

Spinoza Past and Present

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Spinoza Past and Present

Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship

By

Wiep van Bunge



B R I L L

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Cover illustration: Statue of Spinoza made by Frédéric Hexamer (1847–1924). The statue is located near the philosopher's home in The Hague at the Paviljoensgracht and was unveiled in 1880. With kind permission of Roel Wijnants.

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PREFACE

With the exception of the second and tenth chapters, this book was written during the past decade or so, in which I was supposed to write the sequel to *From Stevin to Spinoza* (2001). Instead of fully concentrating on the history of philosophy in the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic, however, I was occasionally diverted by equally rewarding research projects, some of which have found their way into *Spinoza Past and Present*. Now that this book is ready, I hope to be able to leave Spinoza and the seventeenth century gradually behind me. Since the papers collected in the present volume were written for a wide variety of occasions, some overlap has proved to be inevitable. I have slightly altered some of the papers presented here, since on some of the issues involved I have really changed my mind, but I have not attempted to bring them all up to date. The conception of the separate chapters was of course highly dependent on the literature available at the time. For instance, several of the paragraphs presented in this book predate Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* (2001) and *Enlightenment Contested* (2006), while others, on the contrary, are attempts to come to a balanced assessment of Israel's views. In this sense they also reflect at least a part of the history of recent Spinoza scholarship.

A few years ago, Pierre-François Moreau raised the question to what extent Spinoza can be understood to have been a 'Spinozist', since from the early reception of the *TPP* onwards a highly specific *interpretation* of Spinoza's views came to dominate the way in which they were perceived and discussed.¹ This is why in studying the way Spinoza's philosophy first entered the Republic of Letters and has continued to inspire its citizens to this day, we must be particularly concerned to distinguish between his own words and the views attributed to him. This is also why the Bibliography at the end of this book does not differentiate between primary and secondary sources, for many of the more recent publications listed there have been treated as 'primary' sources: here, (late) twentieth-century Spinoza scholarship is a subject of reflection just as much as Spinoza, the Radical Enlightenment and nineteenth-century Spinozism are. In much

¹ Moreau, 'Spinoza, est-il spinoziste?'

of nineteenth and twentieth-century Spinoza scholarship there is only a thin line separating it from Spinozism. A remarkable number of experts on Spinoza's philosophy and on its historical context as well as its subsequent proliferation feel that Spinoza was the author of a *true* philosophy. Indeed, Herman de Dijn recently suggested that Spinoza's philosophy should preferably be studied under the assumption that it is essentially correct.²

The most recent analysis of eighteenth-century French 'neo-Spinozism' takes as its point of departure the view, most forcefully expressed by Pierre Macherey, that Spinozism should itself be regarded as a 'force' rather than as a set of propositions regarding the world and man's relationship to it. This leads its author, Yves Citton, to conclude that works such as the *TTP* and the *E* are themselves highly particular modifications of an essentially timeless collection of philosophical 'tendencies' that every now and again result in the emergence of a Spinozist perspective. Attributing this perspective to Spinoza as its unique author betrays the very essence of Spinozism, or so Citton seems to hold.³ Much as I admire his work, my own aims are less ambitious in that they do not presuppose any privileged access to the essence of Spinozism. I should add that although I have been studying Spinoza's work, the context from which it arose, and the way it was received for quite some time, I am no 'Spinozist'. Instead this collection of papers reflects the concerns of a historian of philosophy, who feels that the history of philosophy is too important to be left to philosophers, and that Spinoza is too interesting a philosopher to be left exclusively to Spinozists.⁴

² In his Preface to Van Reijen, *Spinoza*.

³ Citton, *L'Envers de la liberté*. See also his 'Jacques le fataliste'.

⁴ Cf. North, 'Opvattingen over geschiedschrijving', 43.

CHAPTER ONE

BARUCH OR BENEDICT? SPINOZA AS A 'MARRANO'

1. *Marranos'*

How Jewish was the greatest philosopher the Netherlands ever produced? He was born in 1632 in Amsterdam as Baruch de Spinoza, but after his expulsion from the Portuguese synagogue in 1656 he called himself 'Benedictus' de Spinoza. Some of his earliest critics considered his Jewish background to be evident from his writings. Thus, as early as 1674 Willem van Blijenbergh argued that Spinoza's comments in the *TTP* on Adam reminded him of the work of 'rasende Thalmudisten'.¹ Yet this observation was hardly representative of the early reception of the *TTP*, and Van Blijenbergh was mainly struck by its resemblance to the views held by Lodewijk Meyer, Adriaan Koerbagh, Thomas Hobbes, and, of course, René Descartes. Van Blijenbergh knew perfectly well that Spinoza had been responsible for the anonymous *TTP*, and he had closely studied his 1663 introduction to Cartesianism. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century readers of Spinoza also acknowledged his Jewish background, but the more recent insistence on the Marrano roots of Spinozism is relatively new.²

Over the past few decades several specialists bent on rendering Spinoza into an essentially Jewish author have sought to do so by exploring the affiliation of both his life and thought with the culture of the so-called 'Marranos'. They believe to have discovered a pattern of behaviour in Spinoza's intellectual biography originating among the medieval Jewish inhabitants of Spain and Portugal.³ The history of the Jewish community of the Iberian peninsula is well known: after having been tolerated for several

¹ Van Blijenbergh, *De Waerheydt van de Christelijke Godts-Dienst*, 131.

² For a very large collection of eighteenth and nineteenth-century *Spinozana*: Boucher (ed.), *Spinoza*, 6 vols. See esp. the texts by Karl Pierson, Solomon Schindler, Joseph Strauss, and Michael Friedländer.

³ Almost all of the relevant material has been collected by Gebhardt and Révah. See the Introduction by Carl Gebhardt to his edition of *Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa* and his 'Juan de Prado'. The various studies by Israel Révah of this issue have been collected by Henry Méchoulan, Pierre-François Moreau, and Carsten Lorenz Wilke in: Révah, *Des marranes à Spinoza*. See more recently also Osier, *D'Uriel da Costa à Spinoza*; Albiac, *La Synagogue vide; Spinoza and Other Heretics*. Two older, famous studies which concentrate on

centuries by Arab and Christian princes, by the end of the fourteenth century the Jews of Spain and Portugal were being forced to convert to the Catholic faith. As a consequence, so the story goes, a considerable part of the ‘sefardim’ reverted to a strategy of concealment and deceit: while they made it look as if they embraced Christianity, they secretly continued to adhere to the main principles of Judaism. These ‘new Christians’ or ‘conversos’ were also called ‘*marranos*’—a nasty term, meaning ‘pigs’. In the course of the fifteenth century, however, the tension between outward conformity and secret loyalty to the ways of their ancestors started to draw attention and a new wave of anti-Jewish measures forced many ‘Marranos’ to move to Portugal, where initially the pressure to conform appears to have been less intense than it was now becoming in Spain. It would seem that Spinoza’s own family belonged to these refugees who during the sixteenth century had to escape from persecution once again: by the end of the century thousands of Jews had left Portugal in order to settle in Venice, Livorno, Hamburg or Amsterdam, where they suddenly had the chance to live as Jews—or not.⁴

The Portuguese-Jewish community which was founded in Amsterdam was the first of its kind in the province of Holland. While its leaders were trying to establish a Jewish ‘orthodoxy’, and arguably more importantly a set of properly Jewish practices, some Amsterdam Jews of Iberic extraction, or so the story continues, started to question their own inheritance.⁵ For now a unique opportunity presented itself: all of a sudden, Jews were able to choose, for instance, between Judaism and the Reformed creed. We know that around the middle of the seventeenth century Protestant divines launched a major offensive encouraging Jews to convert.⁶ Many of the philo-semitic initiatives of the time were inspired by millenarian expectations. The conversion of the Jews, many Reformed theologians felt, would no doubt facilitate the imminent Second Coming, and this time

the Jewish sources of Spinoza, without any reference to the Marranos: Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* and Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

⁴ Roth, *A History of the Marranos*; Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*.

⁵ Nahon, ‘Amsterdam, métropolis occidentale’; Schwetschinski, ‘The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam’; Israel, ‘Sephardic Immigration into the Dutch Republic’; Fuks-Mansfeld, *De Sefardim in Amsterdam tot 1795*; Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*; Méchoulan, *Être Juif à Amsterdam au temps de Spinoza*; Popkin, *The Third Force*, Chapter 9; Vlessing, ‘The Jewish Community in Transition’; Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*.

⁶ Melnick, *From Polemics to Apologetics*; Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis*; Van den Berg and Van der Wall (eds.), *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century*; Van Rooden, *Theology, Biblical Scholarship and Rabbinical Studies*.

their conversion to Christianity would have to be attempted peacefully. By this time, however, more options had become available, including a road that led, as Richard Popkin put it, 'beyond Judaism and Christianity'.⁷

The authority of the Amsterdam rabbis was anything but self-evident. The first generation of Jews arriving from Portugal and Spain had to build their congregation from scratch and they were facing the challenge of returning to a tradition they had been forced to abandon some seven to eight generations ago. The secretive transmission of beliefs and practices had of course resulted in many uncertainties and ambiguities, as is evident from the early seventeenth-century Amsterdam requests for religious clarification addressed to the rabbis of Venice.⁸ In particular the celebrated rabbi Leon de Modena was asked for advice repeatedly. After Saul Levi Morteira, a former pupil of Modena, as well as Menasseh ben Israel had come to serve the Portuguese community of Amsterdam, however, it soon acquired a considerable reputation of its own.⁹ When Oliver Cromwell during the 1650s was considering the readmittance of the Jews into England, he negotiated the issue with the Amsterdam rabbi Menasseh ben Israel.¹⁰

It is this highly particular history which has often been referred to in attempts to explain how it could come to pass that the young Baruch de Spinoza, on 27 June 1656, was excommunicated by the *parnassim* of the Portuguese community. Spinoza's excommunication, or so we are told, resulted from a highly specific Jewish experience. Odd as this may seem, the fact is that we just don't know *why* Spinoza was banned. The *herem* itself is silent about the motives of Spinoza's critics. The accused was held guilty of 'evil opinions and acts' ('*mas opinoens e obras*') and 'horrible heresies' ('*horrendas heregias*').¹¹ Colerus and Lucas, the two earliest

⁷ Popkin, *The Third Force*, Chapter 22.

⁸ Israel, 'The Jews of Venice and Their Links with Holland'; Bodian, 'The "Portuguese" Dowry Societies in Venice and Amsterdam'.

⁹ Cf. Salomon, *Saul Levi Morteira*; Kaplan, Méchoulan, Popkin (eds.), *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*.

¹⁰ Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews*.

¹¹ Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 115. Vaz Diaz and Van der Tak read '*ma's opinoins e obras*': 'Spinoza Merchant and Autodidact', 164. Cf. Méchoulan, 'Le *herem* à Amsterdam et "l'excommunication" de Spinoza'; Kasher and Bidermann, 'Why was Baruch de Spinoza Excommunicated ?'; Wesselius, 'De ban van Spinoza'. Nadler, *Spinoza*, 129 ff. tries to explain Spinoza's ban by citing texts Spinoza produced long after the event. He assumes the *TTP* contains fragments of a Spanish *Apologia* Spinoza is supposed to have written in 1656. Several contemporary sources seem to confirm that Spinoza indeed composed a defence, and it seems likely he put parts of this apology into the *TTP*, but since this *Apologia* seems lost irrevocably, it seems hazardous to speculate on its contents.

biographers of the young ‘heretic’, did not manage to add much to these general observations: Colerus keeps silent about the possible motives behind the *herem* whereas Lucas’ notoriously unreliable *La Vie de Spinoza* claims Spinoza had been pestering the rabbis with his critical questions from the age of fifteen. According to Lucas, it was Morteira who decided the young ‘Bento’s’ wayward behaviour could no longer be tolerated.¹²

So far, only a single document has been unearthed, by the distinguished French historian Israel Révah, which might perhaps shed further light on the nature of the ‘evil opinions’ Spinoza harboured in 1656. This document consists of a declaration deposited on 8 August 1659 by the Spanish monk Tomas Solano y Robles at the Inquisition in Madrid. Accompanied by a Spanish officer, Solano had paid a short visit to Amsterdam. On 9 August 1659, Solano’s companion made a similar declaration: in Amsterdam both witnesses had made the acquaintance of ‘doctor Prado’ and ‘one d’Espinosa (...) *buen filosofo*’. According to Solano, Prado and d’Espinosa had told them that they had both been excommunicated from the Synagogue ‘since they taught the Law was not true, the soul died, and God existed only “philosophically”’.¹³ De Prado will be dealt with later, but for the moment let us just observe that this information can hardly be considered specific. Doubts about the Bible, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God together hardly constitute anything like a philosophy. Such qualms rather make up the very definition of an early modern ‘unbeliever’. Reports such as Solano’s are, to put it differently, precisely what anyone would expect a ‘heretic’ to profess. Indeed, we are not even sure Spinoza’s expulsion was actually provoked by the *ideas* he may have held by the mid 1650s. The first extant letter by him dates from 1661, five years after he was banned.¹⁴ His first book dates from 1663. Considering the views put forward in his *ST*, composed by 1660, or so it would seem, it appears Spinoza reached some of his main insights at a relatively early age, so the question what actually inspired Spinoza to develop the main tenets of his mature philosophy is a moot point indeed.

¹² *Trattato dei tre impostori*, 12 ff. See also Salomon, ‘La vraie excommunication de Spinoza’.

¹³ Révah, *Des marranes à Spinoza*, 198. (Previously in *Spinoza et le Dr Juan de Prado*, 32.)

¹⁴ See Mignini, ‘Données et problèmes de la chronologie spinozienne’. Shortly following the publication of this fundamental paper, Klever made an important discovery relating to the radically *Cartesian* milieu in which Spinoza was seen to operate in 1661: ‘Spinoza and Van den Enden in Borch’s Diary’. Cf. Nadler, *Spinoza*, Chapter 6.

2. Spinoza and Other Heretics

According to one tradition, both Spinoza's expulsion from the Portuguese community and the chief source of his development as a philosopher are to be sought in his Marrano background. This tradition was established in the 1920s by Carl Gebhardt, and further developed after the Second World War by Révah, who until his death in 1973 held the chair in Spanish at the Collège de France. More recently, it has been rejuvenated by such scholars as Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gabriel Albiac. To both Yovel and Albiac, Révah's discovery that in the 1650s Spinoza had met De Prado serves as the point of departure for extremely ambitious interpretations of Spinoza's philosophical development. In particular Yovel's book on the matter, entitled *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (1989), had a considerable impact, and nowhere more so than in Israel, a country in which the question of the 'essence' of Jewishness has acquired a political urgency of its own.¹⁵ We should not be concerned with the latter issue, and neither should I like to comment on the possibility or even the desirability of a secular Judaism. It surely is interesting to note that for instance Robert Silverman, a British rabbi, has argued at length in favour of a religious reintegration of Spinoza into the Jewish tradition, but Silverman's pastoral preoccupations need not concern us.¹⁶ The Marrano reading of Spinoza, on the other hand, should, for it has been put forward by several prominent philosophers.

According to Yirmiyahu Yovel, professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Spinoza's life and work reveal six crucial elements originating from 'the Marrano experience':

- (1) heterodoxy and the transcendence of revealed religion; (2) a skill for equivocation and dual language; (3) a dual life—inner and external; (4) a dual career with a break between; (5) toleration versus the Inquisition; (6) a zeal for salvation, to be gained by alternate ways to that of tradition, and—coupled with it—this-worldliness, secularism, and the denial of transcendence.¹⁷

¹⁵ The book was well received. See the interviews with Yovel in *Le Monde*, 29 November 1991 and 23 June 1992, as well as the favourable reviews in *The New York Review of Books*, 17 May 1990 (Stuart Hampshire); *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 1 June 1990 (John Cottingham); *The Times Literary Supplement*, 17 August 1990 (Edwin Curley); *Le nouvel observateur*, 21 November 1991 (François Furet); *Le Figaro*, 13 January 1992 (Claude Jan-noud); *Libération*, 14 November 1992 (Edouard Waintrop). Less enthusiastic: *The London Review of Books*, 19 April 1990 (George Steiner). I owe these data to Theo van der Werf.

¹⁶ Silverman, *Baruch Spinoza*.

¹⁷ Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, I, 28 ff.

Quite apart from the obvious objections that Spinoza was no Marrano but a native from Amsterdam, and at best a descendant of Marranos,¹⁸ and that in Western Europe growing doubts concerning the historical accuracy of Revelation were raised well beyond the Jewish community, it also seems odd to maintain that Spinoza was forced to hide his real views ‘as a Marrano’. On the contrary, both the *TTP* and the *E* are remarkably straightforward in their critique of traditional theology and ‘revealed’ religion. If Spinoza indeed attempted to employ a Marrano strategy, he was extremely poor at it: the many contemporary ‘refutations’ of his work are an eloquent testimony to this.¹⁹ Neither does his equally real caution reveal an essentially Jewish trait. Spinoza’s ‘caute’ rather sounds like a reiteration of Descartes’ ‘*larvatus prodeo*'. All seventeenth-century philosophers had to be careful.²⁰ One would almost forget that being in favour of toleration was hardly an exclusive feature of Marranos.

Subsequently, Yovel has argued that it was typical for Marranos to explore secular roads to salvation. Marrano eschatology, or so we are told, was naturalised, and in Spinoza, Yovel continues, this resulted in immanentism, in the complete rejection of transcendence, that is. It remains to be seen, however, whether we actually need this particular tradition to account for Spinoza’s confidence in the salutary effects of philosophy, for this was just as much part and parcel of the Greek and Roman traditions in philosophy.²¹

It would seem, then, that in Gebhart’s, Révah’s as well as Yovel’s reading our ignorance as to why Spinoza was banned is countered by *supposing* that Spinoza met the same fate as Uriel da Costa and Juan de Prado, two famous, earlier victims of the Amsterdam *parnassim*. Yet both the presupposition according to which Spinoza went through a similar development as his ‘predecessors’ had been through, as well as the suggestion that this will help to explain why Spinoza was excommunicated in the

¹⁸ Cf. Méchoulan, ‘Spinoza et le judaïsme’, 152: ‘Avant que de parler de la “judeité” de Spinoza, il convient, une fois pour toutes, d’éliminer définitivement le terme “marrane”. Spinoza n’a jamais appartenu à la communauté marrane d’Amsterdam car elle n’a pas existé. En effet, dès qu’un crypto-juif ibérique gagne les bords de l’Amstel, il jette le masque et devient juif par choix religieux et par existence légale.’

¹⁹ See my ‘On the Early Dutch Reception of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*’, and Chapter 2 of this book.

²⁰ Zagorin, *Ways of Lying*. See also Berti, ‘Unmasking the Truth’. For a further analysis of the measures taken by the Dutch authorities following the publication of the *TTP* in 1670, see Israel, ‘The Banning of Spinoza’s Works’.

²¹ Feldman, ‘Spinoza: A Marrano of Reason ?’, 51. See also Zweerman, *L’Introduction à la philosophie selon Spinoza*.

first place, seem highly questionable: by this procedure an event about which we know next to nothing is explained by introducing the highly doubtful supposition that Da Costa's, De Prado's and Spinoza's behaviour actually fitted a highly particular Marrano pattern. As long as we remain in the dark as to *why* Spinoza was banned, it seems impossible to account for the fact.

According to Odette Vlessing, Spinoza's excommunication had nothing to do with his views. After a careful analysis of the business dealings of the young Spinoza, she has come to the conclusion that the Portuguese establishment of Amsterdam was actually fed up with the young man's attempts to escape the impending bankruptcy of the family firm.²² Indeed, this legal and financial explanation does not exclude intellectual tensions within the Jewish community, for it may well have been the case that Spinoza's financial manoeuvring coincided with his budding critique of revealed religion, but there is no evidence whatsoever even to suggest that Spinoza by 1656 had created a genuine 'philosophy' of his own. How could he possibly have developed a proper 'philosophy'? At the time he was in his early twenties, a young businessman who had left school before reaching the age of 15, and who had probably mastered no or at most a little Latin.²³

Even supposing that Spinoza got into trouble over his ideas, it would appear that if his intellectual development fitted a specific Marrano pattern, this same pattern should have caused many others descendants of Marranos to abandon the Jewish community, but nothing of the sort has transpired. While it is true that we now know of dozens of seventeenth-century *herems*, as a rule they served purely disciplinary purposes. They were not all indicative of any structural dissatisfaction with the Mosaic laws or rabbinical authority. Even the young Menasseh ben Israel was excommunicated, albeit for only a single day: the Portuguese elders felt the newly arrived rabbi could occasionally be quite a nuisance so he was taught a lesson. Spinoza's ban, to be sure, was a much more serious affair, and it remains unique in Spinoza's refusal to beg for mercy and be readmitted.²⁴

²² Vlessing, 'The Jewish Community in Transition', 205–210; 'Waarom Spinoza in de ban werd gedaan', and 'The Excommunication of Baruch Spinoza'.

²³ Klever and Israel are of the opinion that Spinoza's development as a philosopher started well before 1656: Klever, 'Spinoza's Life and Works'; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 159–173. For a more circumspect analysis: De Dijn, *Spinoza*, 3–8.

²⁴ Kaplan, 'The Social Functions of the Herem'. Kaplan has also researched early eighteenth-century unrest within the Portuguese community concerning the so-called

Any comparison between Da Costa and De Prado on the one hand and Spinoza on the other suffers from serious complications. So far, no historical evidence has been unearthed demonstrating any affiliation between Spinoza and Da Costa, who died as early as 1640, when Spinoza was eight years old. What is more, Da Costa was a very religious man, and no philosopher. It is true, however, that Da Costa's first biography, published in 1687, bears the traces of Spinoza's life.²⁵ De Prado's case is even more complicated: ever since Gebhardt he has been identified by many specialists as the young Spinoza's '*corruptor*', and Révah's discovery of a document from 1659 in the archives of the Spanish Inquisition reveals that by this time the two knew each other well. Yet De Prado only settled in Amsterdam in 1655, and if we assume Spinoza was banned on account of his *ideas*, and if Lucas' story according to which Spinoza had been a cause of concern to the rabbis from the age of fifteen is correct, De Prado's arrival in Amsterdam can only have accelerated a process that had already started well before the mid 1650s. And if De Prado was indeed responsible for Spinoza's 'corruption', how could it be that he was only banned half a year *after* Spinoza's excommunication? De Prado had arrived from Hamburg and was a newcomer to the Portuguese community in which the Spinozas had been playing a prominent role for several decades already. One would expect the leaders of the Portuguese community to have been more patient with young Baruch than they actually were. Add to this the decidedly libertine overtones in De Prado's thought, and it becomes difficult to establish any meaningful relationship between his views and the philosophy expounded by the mature Spinoza.²⁶ This is all the more a crucial problem facing the Marrano hypothesis, for while it is one thing to try and explain how it could come to pass that by the middle of the seventeenth century a young businessman was getting into trouble with the religious authorities within the Jewish community of Amsterdam, it is quite another to deliver an analysis of these tensions that could also serve as a point of departure from which we are able to comprehend the subsequent development of this adolescent businessman into an accomplished philosopher. It would seem that, if anything, the comparison with Da Costa and De Prado reveals how *exceptional* Spinoza's position was in the

'Karaites', leaving open the possibility that they were interested in Spinoza: 'Karaites in Early Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam'.

²⁵ See for instance Popkin, *The Third Force*, 158.

²⁶ Cf. Albiac, *La Synagogue* *vide*, 327–377; Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 122–178; Méchoulan, *Être Juif à Amsterdam*, 138 ff.

context of his native community, for Spinoza appears to have accepted the rupture and for instance took no initiative towards reconciliation, whereas Da Costa committed suicide and De Prado begged for mercy. Spinoza does not seem to have inspired fellow *sefardim* either to follow his example—we know of no seventeenth-century Jewish 'Spinozists'—, and Richard Popkin was probably right in suggesting that after 1656 his former co-religionists could not care less about Spinoza.²⁷ The only Jewish Amsterdamer who took the trouble to respond to the mature Spinoza's philosophy was Isaac Orobio de Castro, who actually was a real Marrano, born in Spain and tortured by the Inquisition. After having stayed in the south of France for some time, he moved to Amsterdam in 1662, and in 1687 wrote a single booklet against Spinoza, entitled *Certamen philosophicum*. This 'philosophical fight' put up by Orobio de Castro, however, is an exercise in neo-scholasticism, violently critical of Spinoza's thought.²⁸

In response to some of the criticism of *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, Yovel has attempted to tone down some of the claims put forward in his book. In his reply to Seymour Feldman's comments, for instance, he pointed to the large *variety* of different Marrano cultures. He also stressed his ambition to analyse Spinoza's *transformation* of Marrano culture as well as his intention to have charted 'a holistic psycho-cultural structure'.²⁹ Yovel had never been out, or so he now argued, to 'reduce' Spinoza to his Marrano background; on the contrary, he had never denied the relevance of Descartes and Hobbes to the Dutch philosopher's thought.³⁰ Apart from the fact that this response appeared to imply a considerable watering down of the original argument of *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, it also suggested its vulnerability: no variety of Marrano culture produced any source of Spinoza's philosophy comparable to Descartes' *Principia*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, or, for that matter, a host of other books and pamphlets produced

²⁷ Popkin, 'Notes from Underground'. See also Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 151–152. This appears to be confirmed by the lack of interest in Spinoza displayed by Daniel Levi de Barrios in his seventeenth-century history of the Portuguese community. See Pieterse, *Daniel Levi de Barrios*. See, however, also Gebhardt, 'Juan de Prado', 281–282 and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 173.

²⁸ On Orobio, see Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*. On the *Certamen Philosophicum* see my *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691)*, 204–207. For the curious history of this text as a 'clandestine manuscript', see my 'Les origines et la signification de la Traduction française'.

²⁹ Yovel, 'Spinoza and Other Heretics: Reply to Critics', 85. Cf. the short *Afterword* to the 1992 edition of *Spinoza and Other Heretics*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

by ‘Cartesian republicans’ all active during the stadholderless period in Spinoza’s immediate vicinity.³¹

All these texts have the great advantage that they allow us to assess the extraordinary character of Spinoza’s output, if only since they employ the same conceptual vocabulary Spinoza made use of and because they address the same issues Spinoza dealt with: more in particular, Spinoza’s use of the geometrical order in the *E*, his assessment of doubt in philosophy and science, the analysis of the passions in the context of a moral philosophy, the relationship between state and church, and the question how a state is able to guarantee freedom as well as security to its subjects. Clearly, in the Netherlands these were the major philosophical issues of the day, addressed by Descartes, Hobbes, and their Dutch readers, including Spinoza. Even if Spinoza only became familiar with the Dutch philosophical culture of the age of De Witt after the *herem*, so that it cannot be held responsible for his break with the Portuguese community, to any historian of philosophy the Dutch intellectual context would seem to be far more relevant to the genesis of Spinoza’s thought than his Jewish, let alone his supposed Marrano background. We may at present be ignorant of the reasons for Spinoza’s excommunication, but the event itself seems largely irrelevant to the history of philosophy. Spinoza matters on account of the books he wrote many years *after* the ban. It seems no coincidence that in these books not a single reference to his excommunication is to be found, and there is no mention either of Da Costa and De Prado in any of the early biographies of Spinoza. The only place in Spinoza’s work containing an evident reflection of his own life—the celebrated opening passage of the *TIE*—paints a picture of a long *inner* journey. No mention is made of any ‘corruptor’.

3. La Synagogue vide

In a way, Yovel’s streching of the explanatory capacity of the Marrano hypothesis beyond its potential is unfortunate in that it obscures several much more convincing passages contained in *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, such as the sixth chapter on ‘Knowledge as Alternative Salvation’, but these could have been written without having recourse to the Marrano

³¹ Including Fernando de Rojas’ *La Celestina* (1499 ?), to which Yovel attaches great importance. There is no evidence whatsoever that Spinoza ever read this novel: Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, I, Chapter 4.

hypothesis altogether. A similar verdict seems in order regarding Gabriel Albiac's equally well-written monograph on the 'empty synagogue'. It was first published in 1987 in Spanish, but grew popular in its French translation: *La Synagogue vide* (1994). Albiac is a Spanish professor of philosophy as well as a journalist and novelist, who took his PhD in Paris. He is highly sceptical of the supposed connection between Da Costa, De Prado and Spinoza.³² This, however, makes it difficult to comprehend what we are to make of the 'sources marranes du spinozisme' such as they are announced in the subtitle of his book.

In *La Synagogue vide*, Yovel's 'holistic psycho-cultural structure' is turned into 'une perte absolue d'identité':

Et telle est mon hypothèse: Spinoza comme crystallisation théorique d'une perte absolue d'identité, celle du marrane hispano-portugais, une perte qui sape les fondements de toute conception traditionnelle de la consistance du sujet, et oriente son horizon de pensée vers une théorie de l'imaginaire désirant.³³

It sounds great, but what do these words actually mean? Unless I am mistaken, Albiac is of the opinion that Spinoza served as the Portuguese community's 'porte-parole': after two centuries of loss of identity, Spinoza destroyed the very metaphysical structure which produced the concept of identity to begin with by announcing 'the death of the subject'. There is much to be admired in *La Synagogue vide*, but this conclusion is evidently at odds with the remarkable tenacity with which the generations of persecuted Jews successfully persevered in cultivating their distinctive cultural identity. Albiac seems to lose sight of the fact that on the borders of the Amstel a prospering and flourishing community of *sefardim* was established. In 1675, in the presence of William III, it inaugurated a large and beautiful synagogue—to this day the pride and joy of Amsterdam Jewry. Again, Spinoza's desire no longer to be part of this community was truly exceptional and resulted from a uniquely personal decision on his part.

It seems to have been Albiac's main concern to combat the portrayal of Spinoza as an 'intellectualist rationalist' expounding a theory promising 'salvation'.³⁴ According to Albiac, Spinoza should rather be understood as the first coherent materialist philosopher, and as—I quote—an 'intellectual terrorist': on the 'eternal battlefield of the history of philosophy',

³² Albiac, *La Synagogue vide*, 327 ff. and 419 ff.

³³ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 410 en 441 ff.

Spinoza, or so Albiac holds, staged a ‘suicidal guerrilla warfare’.³⁵ This, of course, raises many questions, including the obvious one of whether Spinoza was indeed a materialist, but it also leads to a highly peculiar picture of Spinozism as a seventeenth-century precursor to Existentialism.³⁶ In fact, *La Synagogue vide* is heavy with all sorts of apodictic qualifications which together make for a great read, but they hardly result in a balanced assessment of Spinoza’s philosophy. In a long chapter on Spinoza as the first ‘secular Jew’³⁷—according to Yovel he was nothing of the sort—suffering from ‘existential solitude’, it remains perfectly obscure what this ‘solitude’ actually amounted to, apart from the fact that Spinoza was an *exceptional* philosopher. But this has become a cliché among Spinoza experts, who more often than not simply refuse to compare Spinoza to other philosophers. If anything, the fact that Spinoza was indeed unique in the Marrano tradition only demonstrates that we should be looking for alternative contexts in which to situate his life and thought in a more convincing manner.³⁸ The most serious complication, or so it would seem, of the Marrano hypothesis shared by Yovel and Albiac stems from its reliance on *psychological* categories. Historians of philosophy should concern themselves with the study of *ideas*, their sources, and the cultural contexts in which they served their purpose and acquired meaning, rather than with moods, attitudes, let alone ‘feelings’ such as solitude and loneliness.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 399–404.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 456–460.

³⁷ On Spinoza and Jewish ‘identity’ see, for instance Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*; Sutcliffe, ‘Judaism in Spinoza and his Circle’. Both authors feel Spinoza matters greatly to the Jewish identity, but this of course does not imply that the issue of a Jewish identity mattered greatly to Spinoza.

³⁸ Yovel fails to acknowledge several crucial facts regarding the Dutch Republic. He seems to believe, for instance, that seventeenth-century Holland was completely dominated by Calvinists (and he calls Christiaan Huygens *secretary* of the Académie royale—a mistake that would have infuriated Christiaan’s father: Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, I, 172). According to Yovel, Spinoza ‘was never fully integrated within the Dutch republic. His belonging to it was more an abstract political stance than a living experience’. This, or so Yovel holds, was the result of Spinoza’s refusal to join a Christian congregation following the *herem*, and this ‘in an era when it was virtually impossible for anyone to exist and find his identity other than from within a recognized religious frame-work.’ (I, 174) The fact is, however, that during the seventeenth century large percentages of the Dutch population were not associated with any established church. The process of confessionalisation was still far from complete. See for instance Knippenberg, *De religieuze kaart van Nederland*; Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries*; Woltjer, ‘De plaats van de calvinisten in de Nederlandse samenleving’; Bergsma, ‘Church, State and People’; Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*.

4. La Judéité de Spinoza

Meanwhile, the failure of the Marrano hypothesis to deliver a credible context from which Spinozism can be seen to have emerged should not obscure the use Spinoza made of Jewish sources. Arguably the most interesting case is presented by the sixteenth-century neo-Platonist Leon Ebreo.³⁹ Especially Spinoza's *KV* clearly reveals traces of Ebreo's work, but the large majority of experts appear to agree that these have disappeared from the mature philosopher's writings. The mature Spinoza was certainly no Platonist. Another Jewish authority who may well have been important to the Dutch philosopher was Hasdai Crescas, a fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century rabbi, whose only son was killed in Barcelona in 1391 during anti-Semitic riots, but he does not figure in either Yovel's or Albiac's accounts.⁴⁰ Even Ze'ev Levy, professor at Tel Aviv, who does regard the young Spinoza as still a Jewish thinker, shows considerable reticence when it comes to assessing the nature of the mature philosopher's thought: 'It seems to me, however', Levy concludes in his *Baruch or Benedict*: 'that the Jewish thinkers, except Crescas, exerted little influence on the shaping of Spinoza's general philosophical system'.⁴¹

The only major Jewish author Spinoza discusses at some length is, of course, Maimonides—who lived well before the Marrano experience—but as will be only too familiar, Spinoza is extremely critical of Maimonides. In addition, there are excellent reasons for suspecting that the views Spinoza attributed to Maimonides in his *TPP* were in reality those upheld by his old friend Lodewijk Meyer. The way in which Spinoza accuses Maimonides of subjecting the authority of Scripture to the dictates of reason strongly suggests that his real target was Lodewijk Meyer's infamous *Philosophia Scripturae Interpres* (1666). A similar tactic recurs in the eighteenth chapter of the *TPP*, on the Hebrew State.⁴² Spinoza's remarks on the political genius displayed by Moses following his people's

³⁹ The earliest study of the Jewish backgrounds to the *KV* I know was published by Joël: *Zur Genesis der Lehre Spinozas*. More recently, Levy wrote the highly speculative 'Sur quelques influences juives'. Even more adventurous is Saccaro Battisti's claim according to which Spinoza's philosophy resulted from a continuing debate with Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo*: 'Abraham Cohen Herrera et le jeune Spinoza'. On the *Puerta*, first published in 1655 in Amsterdam, see Altmann, 'Lurianic Kabbalah in a Platonic Key'.

⁴⁰ See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, *passim*; Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*.

⁴¹ Levy, *Baruch or Benedict*, 22. Cf. 31–35. Unfortunately, Levy fails to clarify *in which respect* Crescas remained important to Spinoza.

⁴² Terpstra, 'De betekenis van de oudtestamentische theocratie'. See, on the party-political character of the *TPP*, also Balibar, *Spinoza et la politique*. For the Marrano

flight from Egypt were an obvious comment on the recent history of the Dutch Republic. Dutch authors had been comparing William of Orange to Moses from the sixteenth century onward and Maurice had often been represented as a second Aaron. The idea of the Dutch Republic as a ‘Second Israel’ was to remain influential until well into the eighteenth century.⁴³ At the end of the stadholderless period, Spinoza’s warning about erecting a monarchy over a people unaccustomed to living under princes was highly topical.

Recently, however, the view according to which Maimonides was crucial to the young Spinoza has been taken up again with considerable vigour. As yet, no clear consensus appears to be emerging, but this new research clearly supersedes the Marano-hypothesis.⁴⁴ It is also far superior to the way in which some specialists have pointed to general tendencies present in both the Jewish tradition and Spinoza. Victor Cousin, for example, suggested considering Spinoza’s monism as a philosophical translation of Jewish monotheism.⁴⁵ Apart from the fact that this is such a general remark that it is difficult to see what it may actually help to explain, it also adds to the confusion, for if philosophical monism is indeed the natural ‘result’ of traditional Jewish theology, how are we to account for the uniqueness of Spinoza’s excommunication? Other scholars, most notably Geneviève Brykman, have even argued that the apparent silence on Spinoza’s part about his Jewish sources, and more in particular the virtual absence of any Jewish dimension to his debut, the *Principia Philosophiae Cartesianaæ* from 1663, ‘demonstrate’ the importance Spinoza continued to attach to his Jewish background.⁴⁶ Brykman also feels that historians of philosophy have a lot to learn from psychology, and more in particular from Freud: in her account, the *absence* of Jewishness serves to indicate the extent to which Spinoza struggled with his Jewish ‘identity’.

For now, while we are still waiting for a comprehensive re-assessment of the relevance for Spinoza’s philosophy of such Jewish thinkers as Cres-

background to the third chapter of the *TTP*, on the election of the Jews, see Yerushalmi, *Sefardica*, 173–233.

⁴³ Groenhuis, ‘Calvinism and National Consciousness’; Huisman, *Neerlands Israël*; Bischop, *Sions vorst en volk*.

⁴⁴ Nadler, *Spinoza’s Heresy* and ‘The Jewish Spinoza’; Ravven, ‘Some Thoughts. Part One’ and ‘Some Thoughts. Part Two’; Chalier, *Spinoza, lecteur de Maimonide*; Fraenkel, ‘Maimonides’ God’; Rudavsky, ‘Jewish Philosophical Influences’. Joshua Parens announces the imminent publication of a critical re-assessment: *Maimonides and Spinoza*.

⁴⁵ Cousin, ‘Spinoza et la Synagogue’. Cf Albiac, *La Synagogue vide*, 224 ff.; Levy, *Baruch or Benedict*, Chapter 4.

⁴⁶ Brykman, *La Judéité de Spinoza*, 31.

cas and Maimonides, we are, I feel, best advised to abandon the Marrano-hypothesis. Since probably no major philosopher can be reduced to a single intellectual context, from which his work can be understood to have arisen, it seems imperative to broaden our perspective.⁴⁷ The intellectual history of the Dutch Republic, and especially of the stadholderless period, during which Spinoza grew into maturity, appears to contain a wealth of material suited to reconstructing the genesis of Spinozism as well as its first proliferation. Let us not forget that Spinoza was born in Amsterdam, died in The Hague, and never left the territory of the Dutch Republic. As far as we now know he only left the province of Holland once, when in 1673 he made a visit to the French armies, holding camp at Utrecht. Compare this, if you will, to the many travels undertaken by Descartes, Hobbes, Locke and Leibniz, to name just a few of Spinoza's more obvious (near) contemporaries. Moreover, in stark contrast to the Marrano hypothesis, as a cultural context the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic is perfectly able to include the two major seventeenth-century philosophers Spinoza was constantly commenting upon, for both Descartes and Hobbes enjoyed considerable success in the Netherlands of the time, both inside and outside the Dutch universities.

Two eminent specialists on the seventeenth-century Jewish community have pointed in a similar direction, for in one of the finest reconstructions of Spinoza's excommunication now available, Asa Kasher and Shlomo Biderman have suggested that the unrest over the proliferation of Cartesianism at the university of Leiden in 1656 in particular may well have caused the elders of the Portuguese community to get rid of the young Spinoza. Should Spinoza indeed by this time have demonstrated interest in Descartes' views, this could well have served as the final straw: this was one battle the Portuguese community could well do without.⁴⁸ Clearly, Spinoza was no 'ordinary' Cartesian and much as he admired Hobbes, he was also highly critical of 'the Monster of Malmesbury', but for any understanding of his mature philosophy, the way in which he responded to Descartes and Hobbes was at least as important as the way in which he 'wrestled' with his Jewish 'identity'.

⁴⁷ Van Bunge, 'Spinoza's filosofische achtergronden'.

⁴⁸ Kasher and Biderman, 'Why was Spinoza Excommunicated?', 130–133. Cf. Nadler, *Spinoza*, 112–115.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AUTONOMY OF THE ATTRIBUTES

1. *De Vries' Question*

The issue of Spinoza's views on the relationship between substance and its attributes has haunted Spinoza scholarship for a long time. It was first raised at an early stage in Spinoza's philosophical development. On 24 February 1663 Simon Joosten de Vries wrote a letter to his '(m)ost upright friend' Spinoza, informing him that a 'group' had been formed the members of which were studying manuscripts of Spinoza, who at the time had reached the age of thirty. 'One member (each has his turn)', or so De Vries told his friend,

does the reading, explains how he understands it, and goes on to a complete demonstration, following the sequence and order of your propositions. Then if it should happen that we cannot satisfy one another, we have deemed it worthwhile to make a note of it and to write to you so that, if possible, it should be made clearer to us and we may, under your guidance, uphold truth against those who are religious and Christian in a superstitious way, and may stand firm against the onslaught of the whole world.¹

One of the questions the friends could not reach agreement upon concerned the relationship between substance and attributes. De Vries refers to what he calls 'the beginning of the third Scholium to Proposition 8'. In this Scholium Spinoza appears to have affirmed that:

although two attributes may be conceived as really distinct (...) it does not follow that they constitute two entities or two different substances. The reason is that it is of the nature of substance that all its attributes—each one individually—are conceived through themselves, since they have been in it continuously.

De Vries and his friends fail to understand how a substance 'can have several attributes'. As long as this remains unproven, De Vries proceeds, 'if I were to say that each substance has only one attribute, I could rightly

¹ Spinoza, *Letters*, 88 (Letter 8). See Vaz Dias and Van der Tak, 'Spinoza and Simon Joosten de Vries'.

conclude that where there are two different attributes, there are two different substances.'²

Before we can assess Spinoza's reply, it should first be noted that we do not know which text exactly De Vries was quoting. Apparently, De Vries and his 'group' had been studying an early manuscript version of the *E*, the final version of which was only published in 1677. Second, we should be aware of the highly specific background to De Vries' question. To all intents and purposes De Vries' query of 1663 was inspired by the writings of Descartes—that same year Spinoza made his debut with an introduction to the 'Principles of Cartesian Philosophy'. In the appendix to his debut, it is recorded 'that there is nothing in nature but substances and their modes.' Therefore, only three different distinctions exist: 'viz. *real*, *modal*, and *of reason*.' Separate substances are 'really' distinct. A mode is 'modally' distinct from its substance and from other modes, and a distinction 'of reason' exists between a substance and its attributes.³ Because God is absolutely simple, 'we can now clearly conclude that all the distinctions we make between the attributes of God are only distinctions of reason—the attributes are not really distinguished from one another.'⁴

Thus, Spinoza himself made clear that from a Cartesian point of view it is impossible for two attributes that are really distinct to belong to the same substance. In his *Principes de la Philosophie* (I, 53) Descartes had affirmed 'Que chaque substance a un attribut principal, et que celui de l'âme est la pensée, comme l'extension est celui du corps.' Everything which could be attributed to Body except for Extension presupposes Extension, which as a consequence should be deemed the only essential attribute of the substance 'Body'. This attribute 'constitutes' the nature of this substance, and in this Cartesian perspective each substance is only endowed with one, 'really distinct' attribute, constitutive of the substance of which it is an attribute.⁵

Spinoza's reply to De Vries, of March 1663, refers to a definition which he recalls to have given of substance and attribute:

By substance I understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that whose conception does not involve the conception of another thing. I understand the same by attribute, except that attribute is

² *Ibid.*, 90.

³ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 323.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 324–325. See Descartes, *Oeuvres*, IX–II, 51–55.

⁵ Descartes, *Oeuvres*, IX–II, 48.

so called in respect to the intellect, which attributes to substances a certain kind of nature.

In addition, Spinoza reminds De Vries of two proofs he gave in order to demonstrate his proposition that a substance can have more than one attribute. Spinoza is particularly pleased with the second one, according to which ‘the more attributes I attribute to any entity, the more existence I am bound to attribute to it, that is, the more I conceive it as truly existent.⁶

Clearly, De Vries is not satisfied with this reply, for the next letter in Spinoza’s correspondence continues the discussion, and once more the definition of the attribute takes center stage. We gather De Vries had inquired ‘whether we need experience to know whether the definition of some attribute to be true.’ In view of what we have just seen, this seems a perfectly justifiable question, so let us listen to Spinoza’s answer, which makes the point ‘that we need experience only in the case of those things that cannot be deduced from a thing’s definition’, but not ‘in the case of those things whose existence is not distinguished from their essence and is therefore deduced from their definition.’ And since the existence of the attributes cannot be distinguished from their essence, no possible experience can hold any information on the (non)existence of any attribute. As a consequence, the (non)existence of an attribute solely results from its definition.⁷ (The correspondence conveys that De Vries and his friends also had considerable difficulty in grasping Spinoza’s views on definition, just as other correspondents of Spinoza’s were to experience, such as Henry Oldenburg and Tschirnhaus.)⁸

Considering the complexity of the problem put forward by De Vries, but also the closeness of their friendship, Spinoza’s reaction is remarkably brief. The last letter to De Vries barely counts two paragraphs. As if Spinoza could not be bothered with such issues. As if the solution was self-evident. Still, well before the publication of the *E*, De Vries had managed to identify a problem which was to continue to puzzle its readers for centuries to come: if each and every attribute is really distinct from all the others, how is it possible for a substance to consist of infinitely many attributes? How are these attributes able to constitute a substance? Before we return to the seventeenth-century reactions to this issue, let’s

⁶ Spinoza, *Letters*, 93 (Letter 9).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 95 (Letter 10).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 64–66 (Letter 3) en 353–354 (Letter 82).

first have a look at some of the more recent attempts to come to terms with Spinoza's reply to De Vries.

2. *Wolfson to Macherey*

Some experts, it should be noted, do not see any reason for concern. Errol E. Harris, for instance, in his *Salvation from Despair* points to the distinction to be found in *E*, I, def.6expl. between absolute infinity and infinity '*in suo genere*':

Each attribute, therefore, is infinite in its own kind with the infinity of substance, but substance is infinite absolutely, and so its potency is excercised in infinite ways; that is, in infinite attributes. (...) What I wish to emphasize here is that the attributes are distinctions within the nature, or essence, of substance they are not divisions of substance.⁹

Although Harris called this conclusion 'a source of great difficulty, to the discussion of which I shall return',¹⁰ he failed to live up to this promise. Instead he returned to two other problems: how is Spinoza able to arrive at the conclusion that infinitely many attributes exist, and why is it that we only know two of them?¹¹ Harris underestimates the seriousness of De Vries' question because he feels Spinoza's attributes are not *causa sui* and do not exist by virtue of their own essence. Harris appears to base his views on *E*, I, 10schol., but this scholium actually points in the opposite direction, just as Letter 35 does, also quoted by Harris.¹² *E*, I, 10—which together with its scholium reads like the sequel to the correspondence with De Vries—has it that each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself. To which its scholium adds that:

(i)t is of the nature of a substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes it has have always been in it together, and one could not be produced by another, but each expresses the reality, or being of substance.¹³

Letter 35, written to Hudde on 10 April 1666, offers a special occasion to highlight how difficult it becomes in a Spinozist context to distinguish

⁹ Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, 52

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 60 ff. A similar solution has been offered by Kline, 'On the Infinity of Spinoza's Attributes'.

¹² *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 416.

between substance and attributes. Apparently Hudde also saw De Vries' question, for he inquired with Spinoza 'whether there is only one Being which subsists through its own sufficiency, or force.'¹⁴ Spinoza answered in the affirmative, but did so by identifying the characteristics that a being which exists must necessarily possess. Five of the six properties that Spinoza mentions, however, to demonstrate the necessarily unique existence of substance also apply to the attribute.¹⁵ Thus, Spinoza tells us that, first, a being which necessarily exists has to be eternal, but *E*, I, 19 explains in so many words that God or all attributes are eternal and *E*, I, 20cor.2 calls God or all attributes 'immutable'. Second, a necessarily existing being cannot be made up of parts, which holds, as Harris duly emphasises,¹⁶ just as much for the attributes. See *E*, I, 12; 13cor. and schol., and 15. Third, such a being can only be conceived of as being infinite, which again is also true of the attributes, if only on account of the definition of God the *E* supplies (I, def. 6), according to which God is a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence. Fourth, such a being has to be immutable—but so are the attributes, as is evident, again, from *E*, I, 15schol. Next, a being which exists necessarily must be perfect, but if we combine *E*, I, 9—'The more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it' with *E*, II, def.6: 'By reality and perfection I understand the same thing', attributes and perfection are actually identified. The sixth characteristic mentioned in Letter 35 will be addressed below, but for the time being this letter to Hudde only confirms the impression that De Vries' question poses a real problem for Spinoza's metaphysics.

If there's one modern authority on the *E* who has recognised the validity of De Vries' concerns, it must be Jonathan Bennett. With his customary candour, Bennett concludes:

one can indeed argue from Spinozistic premisses that attributes are substances: If substance *x* has attribute *A*, then *A* is the essence of *x* (d 4); if *A* is the essence of *x* then *x* is conceived through *A* (2d2); a substance is conceived only through itself (d 3), and so if substance *x* has attribute *A*, then *x* = *A*.¹⁷

¹⁴ Spinoza, *Letters*, 203 (Letter 35).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 203–204 (Letter 35).

¹⁶ Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, 52.

¹⁷ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 64.

Unfortunately, Bennett subsequently arrived at the conclusion that since there is only a formal distinction between substance and attribute, def. 6 of *E I*—according to which God is a substance *consisting* of infinite attributes—in no way compels us to subscribe to the identity of substance and attributes.¹⁸ Yet the text of the *E* does not appear to allow for any other interpretation than one in which the attributes really *constitute* substance. (See apart from *E*, I, 10schol. also *E*, I, deff.4 and 6; propp. 11 and 19; 2odem. and cor.2).¹⁹

A classical alternative to the anomalies any realist interpretation of the attributes seems to yield is offered by what has often been termed the ‘idealist’ interpretation of the attribute, and the most elaborate version of this way of reading Spinoza’s metaphysics is to be found in H.A. Wolfson’s *The Philosophy of Spinoza*.²⁰ The obvious point of departure of this interpretation is supplied by the ambiguous definition Spinoza gives of the attribute, that is to say by the second half of his definition, the one which figures prominently in Spinoza’s Letter 9, still in the exchange with De Vries: ‘... except that attribute is so called in respect to the intellect, which attributes to substances a certain kind of nature.’ If we are to believe Wolfson, Spinoza’s proposition that attributes are known by themselves means the following:

The two attributes appear to the mind as being distinct from each other. In reality, however, they are one. (...) the attributes are only different words expressing the same reality and being of substance.²¹

Wolfson’s idealist attempt to salvage Spinoza’s distinction between substance and attributes has been definitively refuted by Martial Gueroult.²² Arguably his most fundamental objection is based on Hegel, and is as elegant as it is compelling: if the attributes are indeed the product of the intellect, this would imply the production of attributes by a mode, for the intellect is a mode, and as such a product of the attribute Thought, instead of the other way around. Wolfson, to put it simply, puts Spinoza’s metaphysics on its head.²³ Gueroult’s own attempt to render Spinoza’s metaphysics intelligible is based on his conviction that it conveys first

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹ Cf. Curley, ‘On Bennett’s Interpretation of Spinoza’s Monism’.

²⁰ See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, I, 142 ff.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

²² Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 428–461. See, however, also Eisenberg, ‘On the Attributes’.

²³ *Ibid.*, 430.

and foremost a break with the conception of God as a *simple* being.²⁴ We have to take the *E* literally, Gueroult argues, so God does indeed consist of infinite attributes, which are all *causa sui* and which all have completely distinct essences. They are all attributes of the same substance because they are all *causa sui*, but still they are all really distinct: ‘Ainsi, Dieu est l’unité d’un divers’.²⁵

It remains to be seen how helpful Gueroult’s solution really is, for, as Alan Donagan has pointed out, if all attributes are indeed the same *causa sui*, they can no longer be distinguished by their differing essences.²⁶ What is more, this view is also unable to account for the unity of attributes in God: if these essences are distinct, and if God is nothing but the sum of the attributes ‘carrying’ these essences, how can God be a substance? Nothing *outside* God is able to achieve this unity for God is, of course, also *causa sui*.²⁷ Perhaps the most coherent analysis of Spinoza’s metaphysics was supplied by Pierre Macherey. In his *Hegel ou Spinoza* (1979) Macherey tried to turn the constitution of a single substance by infinite attributes into a pseudo-problem by denying that Spinoza in *E I* is actually referring to a *single* substance. Commenting on De Vries’ question, Macherey admits that it is indeed unanswerable as long as we presuppose any *number* of substances.²⁸ Macherey’s reading of the *E* results, in a sense, in a ‘radical’ Gueroult, in that it affirms the ‘realist’ interpretation of the attributes put forward by Gueroult (as well as Donagan): the attributes are identical to the substance of which they are attributes, and it is precisely

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 446–447. Cf. 237–239.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 238. For a particularly ardent supporter of this interpretation, see Bernhardt: ‘Infini, substance et attributs’. The special significance attributed by these authors to Hobbes has been seriously questioned by Schuhmann, ‘Methodenfragen bei Spinoza und Hobbes’.

²⁶ Donagan, ‘Essence and the Distinction of Attributes’.

²⁷ Donagan, ‘Substance, Essence and Attribute’, 20 note 18. Donagan’s own solution is not very satisfactory either. See *Ibid.*, and Donagan, *Spinoza*, 86–89. If I understand Donagan correctly, he tries to find a way out by formulating a principle not to be found in Spinoza. According to this principle it is logically impossible that there should be a law of nature ruling that the finite modes of substance perceived under one attribute (expressing a definite eternal and infinite essence) display the same *ordo et connectio* to be found in finite modes considered under a different attribute (which of course also expresses an eternal and infinite essence, albeit a different one). But is this principle strong enough? Should it not be logically necessary? Isn’t it risky to turn the construction of the essence of substance from finite modes? *E*, I, 17schol. and II, 10schol. leave no doubt as to the real distinction between the essence of God and the essence of modes—or to put it differently, between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (*E*, I, 29schol.). Donagan, moreover, bases his reconstruction on a passage in the *KV* (I, 2, 17) which does not return in the *E*.

²⁸ Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza*, 120.

by virtue of this identity and because of the real distinction between the attributes, that it becomes impossible to speak of a substance consisting of attributes. Therefore, Macherey emphasises the *negative* way in which Spinoza expresses God's uniqueness in *E*, I, 14cor.1: '... non nisi unam substantiam dari'. This uniqueness, Macherey argues, is not the result of what this substance actually is, but rather of our inability to conceive of the 'Absolute' in any other than a negative way:

Dire qu'il n'y a qu'une seule substance, c'est parler à l'imagination qui ne peut considérer l'absolu que négativement, à partir du néant, c'est-à-dire de la part du possible dont elle l'enveloppe. En lui-même, Dieu n'est pas "un", pas plus qu'il n'est deux ou trois, ou qu'il n'est beau ou laid.²⁹

To put it differently: we should abandon the fundamental misconception according to which Spinoza's metaphysics was essentially a 'monist' 'triumph' over Cartesian 'dualism'.³⁰

Macherey's views will be taken up again below. First let us take a final look at Letter 35, to Hudde, in which Spinoza lists six differences between substance and attribute, for the last one still needs to be considered. Following Spinoza, a being which exists by virtue of its essence has to be perfect and therefore it would have to express every perfection: 'Nor can it exist outside God; for if it were to exist outside God, one and the same nature involving necessary existence would exist in double form, and this (...) is absurd.'³¹ As a consequence, nothing outside God involves necessary existence but God alone. But it remains to be seen whether we are indeed compelled to assume that two necessarily existing beings would have to agree as to their nature.

The same question can be raised in connection with *E*, I, 14: 'Except God, no substance can be or be perceived.' This proposition is based on I, 5, according to which there cannot be in nature two or more substances of the same nature or attribute. This proposition, however, does not exclude the possibility of regarding the attributes as if they were substances, because the attributes do not share a common nature. Again, it is precisely because each and every attribute expresses an infinite essence of its own that it is impossible to conceive of a single substance consisting of infinite attributes. What the attributes have in common is that, being *causa sui*, they all exist in the same way, and this necessary existence

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁰ Cf. Macherey, 'Spinoza est-il moniste?'

³¹ Spinoza, *Letters*, 205 (Letter 35).

which the attributes share is of course not an attribute itself, in the way that Thought and Extension are. To put it differently, Spinoza's proof of the existence of only a single 'divine' substance presupposes the intelligibility of the distinction between substance and attribute, but it is this very distinction which so many seventeenth- as well as twentieth-century students of the *E* have failed to fathom. What is more, they do not see why such a distinction should be made in the first place.

What would be the implications for our understanding of the *E* if we went beyond Macherey and conceived of the attributes as if they were indeed substances? For one thing, *E*, I, 7—'It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist'—would hold for each and every substance. The same would hold for the famous second scholium of I, 8. In this scholium Spinoza explains why there can be only one substance 'of the same nature': the existence of a substance, or so Spinoza argues, follows exclusively from its definition, and since this definition does not involve or express any certain number of individuals, 'the existence of a number of substances cannot follow'.³² In view of Letter 10, to De Vries, in which Spinoza writes that the existence of an attribute solely depends on its definition, it does not seem too far-fetched to consider whether this would not hold for every attribute. This would imply that at least Spinoza's first proof of God's existence, his so-called 'ontological' proof added to proposition 11 which is based entirely on I, 7, would also hold for every individual attribute.

While it is true that proposition 12 tells us that no attribute of a substance can be truly conceived from which it follows that substance can be divided, and in spite of proposition 13 according to which a substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible, the autonomy of the attribute in the context of Spinoza's metaphysics remains intact, for the scholium to *E*, I, 13 informs us 'that by a part of substance nothing can be understood except a finite substance'. An attribute, however, is not finite and therefore cannot be understood as a 'part' of substance. On the contrary, the subsequent corollary makes mention of a 'corporeal substance, insofar as it is a substance'. Shouldn't we rather consider Spinoza's insistence on the indivisibility of substance as evidence of his conviction that reality or Nature consists of attributes, that is of *all* attributes? The rest of *E* I is devoted to the production of modes, which are not so much the result of the single substance, but rather of (and in) the infinite attributes. The notion that all the attributes together make up substance should perhaps

³² Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 416.

be understood not so much as expressing a view regarding the *number* of existing substances, but rather as indicative of a deeper conviction according to which the attributes are *related* to each other in a very specific way. In this perspective, the so-called proofs for the existence of God are designed to demonstrate not so much the existence of any single being as the truly infinite nature of reality, which does indeed stand in need of rational demonstration since human beings only have access to two of the infinite number of dimensions constituting Nature.

3. Early Criticism: Van Velthuysen to Bayle

If Descartes' metaphysics provides the key to understanding *E I*, then clearly the early Cartesian response to Spinoza's metaphysics holds a special interest. First, however, it seems appropriate to emphasise how odd some of the early reactions to Spinoza actually were. Consider, for example, *L'Impie Convaincue, ou Dissertation contre Spinosa* published by Noel Aubert de Versé in 1684. Aubert de Versé felt that Spinoza should have deduced the existence of freedom from the proposition (I, 11) stating that an infinite number of 'things' result from the divine being.³³ Since all modes produced by the attributes are the necessary result of the nature of these attributes, these modes should have been considered free. Curiously, it was no less a critic than Pierre Bayle, who in his *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* was full of praise for this insight: 'L'endroit où il parle de la liberté de Dieu est fort bien. C'est par là qu'il faut repousser les Spinozistes'.³⁴

Aubert de Versé was a Socinian residing in Amsterdam. Using the baroque pseudonym Latinus Serbaltus Sartensis, he got into a quarrel with the Rotterdam Collegiant Johannes Bredenburg, who was suspected of being a covert Spinozist. The story will probably be familiar: in 1684, Bredenburg's opponents published a private manuscript of his, evidencing considerable sympathy for Spinoza's views. It consisted of a short *Wiskunstige Demonstratie* (Mathematical Demonstration), the shape of which was clearly reminiscent of the *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*. In addition Bredenburg had arrived at a pretty Spinozist conclusion: 'the effects

³³ (Aubert de Versé) *L'Impie Convaincu*, 221. See my *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691)*, 230 n 65; Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 81–89; Scribano, *Da Descartes a Spinoza*, 225–240.

³⁴ *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*. Mois d'Octobre 1684 (Amsterdam, 1684), 314.

of the necessary being become or are by eternal necessity such as they are'.³⁵ Bredenburg's 'Spinozism' evoked several dozens of pamphlets and would split the Collegiant movement for many years, and the majority of Bredenburg's contemporaries must have been convinced that the man was indeed a Spinozist. Remarkably, however, no one cared to comment on the curious nature of Bredenburg's Spinozism, for in his view 'working' should be deemed one of God's 'attributes'. Isaac Orobio de Castro, for instance, one of Bredenburg's more famous critics and incidentally the only seventeenth-century member of the Jewish community of Amsterdam who took the trouble to respond to Spinoza's mature philosophy, believed he had refuted Spinoza by having demolished Bredenburg.³⁶ Philippus van Limborch, the celebrated professor of the Remonstrant Seminary in Amsterdam, publicly exchanged several letters with Bredenburg and he does not mention either how odd it is from a Spinozist perspective to regard 'working' as a divine attribute.³⁷ Bredenburg and his critics probably regarded 'working' as a non-essential attribute.

Following Descartes, every substance was thought to have only one essential attribute, constitutive of its nature. Spinoza on the other hand argued that each and every attribute of substance must be deemed essential. This is also the way in which the Leiden professor Burchard de Volder appears to have interpreted the issue, as is suggested by the latter's extensive correspondence with Leibniz, which has recently been studied by Wim Klever.³⁸ On 6 September 1700 Leibniz inquired with De Volder what he knew about the disputes concerning Bredenburg's Spinozism.³⁹ In his reply, De Volder displayed a remarkable sympathy for Bredenburg's stance.⁴⁰ On 13 February De Volder wrote to Leibniz that it would be a mistake to regard the attribute as a problematic notion, since the concept of substance was identical to that of attribute.⁴¹ Moreover, De Volder

³⁵ Lemmerman, *Eenige Bewijzen*, tweede deel, 8.

³⁶ Orobio de Castro, *Certamen Philosophicum*. See De Carvalho, *Oróbio de Castro*; Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*; Caballero, 'La critica de Orobio de Castro a Spinoza'; Van Bunge, 'Les origines et la signification de la *Traduction française*'.

³⁷ *Schriftelyke Onderhandeling*.

³⁸ Klever, 'Burchard de Volder (1643–1709)'. See also Ruestow, *Physics at Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Leiden* and De Pater, 'Experimental Physics'.

³⁹ Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, II, 213.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 217–219.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 223: 'Quaeris deinde, annon ad substantiae conceptum indigeamus attributis? Procul omni dubio, si de determinatae substantiae conceptu agatur. Illa enim ut nihil est praeter naturam suam, sic ejus conceptus nihil reprezentat praeter attributum.'

argued, besides modes and substances or their attributes nothing can be conceived as really existing.⁴² By implication, De Volder must have left open the possibility that ‘working’ was among God’s non-essential attributes, which, paradoxically, turns his sympathy for Bredenburg into a token of his Cartesianism rather than being evidence of his Spinozism.

De Volder deserves some attention in this context, also because Klever has tried to turn him into a ‘crypto-Spinozist’. When Leibniz hinted at this possibility, De Volder reacted furiously: Spinoza, he reminded his German correspondent, had been of the opinion that Thought and Extension were attributes of a single substance, and this, he insisted, was obviously ridiculous.⁴³ De Volder’s sincerity is evident from his principled rejection of the notion that it is possible for a substance to consist of really different attributes:

Ponamus porro substantiam esse quae habet duo attributa A et B, talia tamen ut separari a se invicem queant, nec idcirco habeant nexus necessarium et reciprocum; nam si hunc nexus habeant, non erunt duo attributa sed unum. Cum itaque utrumque hoc attributum sit substantiae attributum, subjectum attributi A erit ipsum attributum A, et subjectum attributi B erit ipsum attributum B; quae attributa cum differant, different etiam subjecta, quae cum attributis idem sunt, different ergo substantiae. Unde haec substantia non erit una, sed ex duabus tantopere ac ipsa attributa a se invicem differentibus substantiis composita.⁴⁴

A similar argument seems to lie behind the rather cursory observation made by the Utrecht regent and physician Lambertus van Velthuysen in his *Tractatus de Cultu Naturali, et Origine Moralitatis. Oppositus Tractatui Theologico-Politico, et Operi Posthumo B.D.S.*⁴⁵ So far, this book has been sadly neglected by historians of philosophy, but it contains a number of interesting insights into the way in which Spinoza was read by his first audience.⁴⁶ As early as the second page Van Velthuysen states that he is incapable of grasping how Spinoza could have believed to have demonstrated the existence of a single substance. In view of Spinoza’s definition of attributes and his insistence on the real distinction between them, he should of course have deduced the existence of an infinite number of

⁴² *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 242–243. Cf. 228 and 235–238.

⁴⁵ In: Van Velthuysen, *Opera Omnia*.

⁴⁶ See, however, Klever, *Verba et Sententiae Spinozae*, 42–53.

separate substances.⁴⁷ It should be added that Van Velthuysen was in a special position: he came to know Spinoza well. From Letter 69 it is obvious that Spinoza was even ready (and he hardly ever was) to acknowledge the acuity of this opponent.⁴⁸ No doubt Spinoza went out of his way to convince Van Velthuysen of the plausibility of his metaphysics, but he clearly failed to do so. Van Velthuysen, incidentally, does not seem to have cared much for metaphysics; he was much more interested in social and political philosophy.⁴⁹

Many other seventeenth-century critics of Spinoza, to be sure, were primarily interested in metaphysical issues, and the Leiden professor Christopher Wittichius, a noted Cartesian, is a case in point.⁵⁰ In 1690 he published a book entitled *Anti-Spinoza*, which five years later would also become available in Dutch. It consists of a running commentary on the *E*, and was widely praised as a particularly thorough onslaught on the major ‘atheist’ of the day. Important journals such as the *Bibliotheque Universelle et Historique* and the *Boekzaal van Europe* congratulated its author with its effectiveness.⁵¹ For our purposes, Wittichius’ comments on *E*, I, 10, according to which each attribute has to be understood through itself, seem particularly relevant: ‘If this proposition is true’, Wittichius observed,

one would have to affirm that each and every attribute of a substance is itself a substance, and that as a consequence every substance consists of substances. For this is how he [Spinoza] has defined a substance: a substance is the thing which is in itself and which is perceived by itself. (...) So to the extent to which God in his view is a substance constituted by infinite attributes, God is a substance consisting of infinite substances: therefore, it is false that there is only a single substance, since there are actually infinitely many substances.⁵²

Wittichius had carefully prepared his deconstruction of Spinoza’s proof of the existence of God by denying the possibility for a substance to have

⁴⁷ Van Velthuysen, *Tractatus de Cultu Naturali*, 1372. Cf. 1394.

⁴⁸ Cf. Clever, *Verba et Sententiae Spinozae*, 21–38.

⁴⁹ Cf. Blom, ‘Lambert van Velthuysen et le naturalisme’.

⁵⁰ See Scribano, *Da Descartes a Spinoza*, 114–122; Siebrand, *Spinoza and the Netherlanders*, 95–119.

⁵¹ See for example *Bibliotheque Universelle et Historique de l’année MDCXCII* Tome XXIII-2, Amsterdam 1699 (Second edition), 322–359; *De Boekzaal van Europe*. Julius en Augustus 1696 (Rotterdam, 1696), 305–321; De Vet, ‘La Bibliotheque Universelle et Historique’ and ‘Spinoza’s afwezige aanwezigheid’.

⁵² Wittichius, *Onderzoek van de Zede-Kunst*, 65–66.

more than one ‘really distinct’ attribute.⁵³ In a highly detailed assessment of Spinoza’s definition of God he had also pointed to Spinoza’s correspondence with De Vries.⁵⁴ Wittichius had denied categorically what Spinoza had written to De Vries, that the more reality a being has, the more attributes it must possess. To Wittichius’ mind, the reality of a being does not depend on the number of attributes it has, but exclusively on its perfection.⁵⁵ God is not the most real being on account of the number of his attributes, but because there is no imperfection in Him.

Even ‘amateurs’ such as the grain merchant from Dordrecht, Willem van Blijenbergh, did not fail to seize on De Vries’ questions. In his *Wederlegging Van de Ethica of Zede-Kunst Van Benedictus de Spinosa* (Refutation of Benedictus de Spinoza’s Ethics) of 1682 his comments on *E*, I, 10 sound very familiar by now:

if he [Spinoza] states that the attribute of a substance has to be perceived by itself, does he mean to say that the attribute differs from substance or is he of the opinion that the attribute is identical to substance?⁵⁶

Unfortunately, instead of further concentrating on this issue, Van Blijenbergh went on to argue in a very confused way against *E*, I, 23, on the ‘immediate’ and ‘mediate’ infinite modes—Van Blijenbergh appears to have believed Spinoza was still dealing with attributes. Wittichius had been honest enough to admit that he could not make head or tail of Spinoza’s notoriously difficult propositions regarding the infinite modes.⁵⁷ Van Blijenbergh on the other hand insisted on questioning the possibility for modes to be either finite or infinite.⁵⁸

Arguably the best known seventeenth-century critic of the *E* was, of course, Pierre Bayle, and his analysis also brings together acute observations as well as perfectly superfluous digressions. Following his article in the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, in the *Dictionnaire* (1696) he argued as follows: ‘Il est impossible que l’univers soit une substance unique; car tout ce qui est étendu a nécessairement des parties, et tout ce qui a des parties est composé; (.)’⁵⁹ Among Spinoza experts Bayle was vili-

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18: ‘... a real attribute is identical to the substance itself and can only be distinguished by reason.’

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19–31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

⁵⁶ Van Blijenbergh, *Wederlegging Van de Ethica*, 30–31.

⁵⁷ Wittichius, *Ondersoek Van de Zede-Kunst*, 93–94.

⁵⁸ Van Blijenbergh, *Wederlegging Van de Ethica*, 89.

⁵⁹ Bayle, *Écrits sur Spinoza*, 60.

fied for a long time: he was widely held to have completely misunderstood Spinoza because of his inability to grasp the difference between *natura naturans*, that is God or all attributes, and *natura naturata*, the modes. Quite apart from the fact that Spinoza's assessment of the relationships both between substance and its attributes and between the attributes and their modes continues to haunt the experts to this day, Bayle's comments should not be discarded too easily. Several years ago, Geneviève Brykman and Leszek Kolakowski already attempted to come to a more charitable reading of Bayle's rendering of the *E*.⁶⁰ For now, it suffices to note that Bayle completely agreed with earlier critics such as Van Velthuysen, Van Blijenbergh and Wittichius, for his complaint that Spinoza had turned God into a composite and therefore destructible, finite being, was ultimately based on the latter's crucially mistaken analysis of the attribute:

Or selon Spinoza, l'étendue en général est l'attribut d'une substance. Il avoue avec tous les autres philosophes, que l'attribut d'une substance ne diffère point réellement de cette substance; il faut donc qu'il reconnaisse que l'étendue en général est une substance; d'où il faut conclure que chaque partie de l'étendue est une substance particulière; ce qui ruine les fondements de tout le système de cet auteur.⁶¹

In sum, Spinoza's God is extended, and therefore divisible, finite and mutable, because his attributes are substances themselves, and this is so because he failed to supply a proper distinction between substance and its attributes.

4. *Spinoza and Dutch Spinozism*

Spinoza's reaction to criticism seems to have been often decidedly haughty, as is evident from his correspondence with Van Blijenbergh, but also from his replies to Jacob Ostens. Van Blijenbergh's questions, provoked by Spinoza's debut on the principles of Cartesian philosophy, were perfectly justified, as were many of the early comments on the *TPP*.⁶² As

⁶⁰ Brykman, 'La "Réfutation" de Spinoza'. See also Vemière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 288–306; Kolakowski, 'Pierre Bayle'.

⁶¹ Bayle, *Écrits sur Spinoza*, 61.

⁶² For Spinoza's correspondence with Van Blijenbergh, see my 'De Rotterdamse collegiant Jacob Ostens'. See also Deleuze, *Spinoza. Philosophie pratique*, Chapter 3 and Klever, 'Blijenberghs worsteling met het kwaad'. As far as early criticism of the *TPP* is concerned, see my 'On the Early Dutch Reception of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*' and 'Van Velthuysen, Batelier and Bredenburg'.

far as the early confusion regarding Spinoza's analysis of the attribute is concerned, however, a coherent reply does seem feasible. In particular Macherey's suggestion no longer to regard Spinoza as a metaphysical monist seems to show the way. Macherey's comments follow from his re-evaluation of Spinoza's relationship to Hegel, which completely isolates Spinoza from his seventeenth-century context. This is in line with his strict separation between historiography and philosophy: in Macherey's view, for instance, the question of Spinoza's intended audience does not tell us anything about the nature of his philosophy.⁶³ And yet, Macherey claims that one of the fundamental differences between Hegel and Spinoza becomes visible in the way they relate to their disciples: 'La philosophie de Hegel s'enseigne à des élèves, de haut en bas; la philosophie de Spinoza se transmet à des disciples, à égalité'.⁶⁴ At a German conference entitled *Spinoza und der deutsche Idealismus*, Macherey provoked '(l)ang anhaltender Applaus' with a penetrating intervention on the real presence of Spinoza in the history of philosophy: Spinoza, so he put it, was the only philosopher whose thought served as mirror to Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Although this does not throw new light on Spinoza's thought itself, Macherey continued, it does result in a new perspective on those German thinkers.⁶⁵ As a consequence, Kant and his immediate successors were Spinoza's true 'disciples' to the extent that they did not follow the Dutch philosopher.⁶⁶

Perhaps more can be made of the seventeenth-century context that Spinoza was part of. What are we to make of Spinoza's use of a Cartesian vocabulary, and what if we no longer regard his 'monism' as a triumph over Cartesian dualism? If his critics were right in insisting on the incoherence of his 'Cartesian monism', what meaning are we to attach to Spinoza's use of Cartesianism? As early as the *Cogitata Metaphysica* Spinoza endorses the Cartesian point of view that God's attributes are not really distinct, because God is perfectly simple. If, however, a Spi-

⁶³ Macherey, *Avec Spinoza*, 25. Macherey goes on, however, to explain the exceptional character of Spinoza's thought by taking recourse to his position as a seventeenth-century Jewish inhabitant of Amsterdam.

⁶⁴ Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza*, 9.

⁶⁵ Walther (ed.), *Spinoza und der deutsche Idealismus*, 196.

⁶⁶ Macherey, *Avec Spinoza*, 31: 'Dans ces conditions, qu'est-ce qu'être "spinoziste"? Ce n'est certainement pas proclamer, et prétendre justifier, l'adhésion à un ensemble d'idées dont la figure serait parfaitement délimitée et close. Mais c'est plutôt se laisser prendre, et comme aspirer, par l'ouverture d'une rationalité, d'une puissance intellectuelle, perpétuellement ouverte, qui trouve son adéquation en s'identifiant au mouvement de la réalité, et non seulement en effectuant un double conforme'.

nozist perspective entails a real distinction between the attributes, are we not best advised to regard *E I* as a deliberate attempt to destroy the Cartesian conception of substance, rather than as its ultimate perfection? Several years ago, Theo Verbeek, unquestionably the greatest expert on Dutch Cartesianism, suggested that we should not look upon Spinoza as a ‘continuation’ of Descartes’ philosophy, but instead as a ‘reaction to it’.⁶⁷ The Cartesian notion of substance, Verbeek argued, was refuted rather than that it was used by Spinoza, who subtly demonstrated the anomalies of Cartesianism in order to make them harmless.⁶⁸ This suggestion fits hand in glove with the unanimous rejection of Spinoza’s metaphysics as an essentially destructive force by the large Cartesian faction in late seventeenth-century Dutch philosophy.

How about Spinoza’s followers? How did they respond to de Vries’ question? It would seem that among his first supporters hardly any attempt was made to come to terms with it: Balling, Jelles, Koerbagh and Meyer simply do not address the issue. Other early ‘Spinozists’ such as Pontiaan van Hattem and Frederik van Leenhof also remained silent. As we have seen, Johannes Bredenburg only added to the confusion concerning Spinoza’s metaphysics. The Amsterdam shopkeeper Willem Deurhoff wrote quite extensively, especially on *E*, I, 8schol.2, but he was of the opinion that the conception of God as consisting of infinite attributes was deeply flawed, which means that his so-called ‘Spinozism’ cannot be taken too seriously.⁶⁹ The most elaborate Dutch Spinozist treatment of the relationship between substance and attribute can be found in Abraham Cuffeler. This lawyer from The Hague in 1684 published a *Specimen Artis Ratiocinandi*, in which he took to task several critics of Spinoza, including Van Blijenbergh and Adriaan Verwer, the author of ‘*t Mom-Aensicht der Atheistery* (The Mask of Atheism). Van Blijenbergh was mistaken, Cuffeler felt, to assume that to Spinoza God is an extended being: God is not *natura naturata*, Cuffeler argued.⁷⁰ This is certainly true, but not very helpful either, and in the end Cuffeler resorts to paraphrasing the *E*:

⁶⁷ Verbeek, *De vrijheid van de filosofie*, 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁹ Deurhoff, *Voorleeringen van de Heilige Godegeleerdheid*, 82–83 and 56–57. See Van Bunge, *Monnikhoff, Deurhoff en Spinoza*, 16–18.

⁷⁰ (Cuffeler), *Specimen Artis Ratiocinandi*, 222–230 and 230–239; Verwer, ‘*t Mom-Aensicht der Atheistery*. On Cuffeler, see Schröder, *Spinoza in der deutschen Frühaufklärung*, 133–135 and Siebrand, *Spinoza and the Netherlanders*, 49–65. On Verwer, see Jongeneelen, ‘Disguised Spinozism in Verwer’s *Mom-Aensicht*’.

(...) in rerum natura non dari neque dari posse plures (quemadmodum vulgo inepte asseritur) substantiae quam una, quae a nobis non potest concipi nisi existens, quaeque etiam necessaria existit, quaeve habet essentiam infinite perfectam, inexhaustam, & constantem, infinitis attributis quorum quodlibet infinitam ejus essentiam infinite exprimit, quae omnia complectitur, in cuius essentia omnia quae sunt, erunt vel fuerunt ab aeterno fuerunt inclusa, sine qua nihil esse, neque a nobis concipi potest, (...)⁷¹

This provided Bayle with the opportunity to lash out against Cuffeler, who had complained about the ignorance of Spinoza's critics, arguing that Spinoza had equated God with Nature.⁷² If, Bayle mused, Spinoza had not considered Nature as the only divine being, then why had he written in *E*, I, 14 that except God, no substance can be or be conceived, and in I, 15 that whatever is, is in God, and that nothing can be or be conceived without God? Unfortunately, the only other late seventeenth-century Dutch Spinozist who could be of help in elucidating the matter was remarkably lax in his use of the concept of 'attribute': the Calvinist minister Petrus van Balen, author of a Spinozist logic entitled *De verbetering der gedagten* (1684, *The Emendation of Thoughts*), carelessly alternates strictly Cartesian passages on the notion of substance with Aristotelian phrases.⁷³ On De Vries' question, Van Balen remains silent.

What does this silence tell us? It may help us to come to a proper assessment of the meaning and relevance of seventeenth-century Dutch Spinozism. Quite apart from the *historical* significance of the Radical Enlightenment made up of Dutch 'Spinozists', from a strictly *philosophical* point of view the relevance of early Dutch Spinozism seems limited, especially in comparison to Dutch Cartesianism. Whereas Descartes inspired such brilliant thinkers as Geulinckx and Johannes de Raey,⁷⁴ Spinoza's early critics may well have been more interesting than his first supporters.⁷⁵

⁷¹ (Cuffeler), *Specimen Artis Ratiocinandi*, 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 113, cited in Bayle, *Écrits sur Spinoza*, 77–78.

⁷³ See the Introduction to Van Balen, *De verbetering der gedagten*, 32–33.

⁷⁴ On Geulinckx, see for example Geulinckx, *Van de hoofddeugden*. On De Raey, see: Verbeek, 'Tradition and Novelty' and *De Vrijheid van de filosofie*.

⁷⁵ Cf. Petry, 'Nieuwentijt's Criticism of Spinoza' and 'Kuyper's Analysis of Spinoza's Axiomatic Method'.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IDEA OF A SCIENTIFIC MORAL PHILOSOPHY

1. *Practical Purposes*

There can be little doubt that Spinoza felt a scientific moral philosophy was not only feasible, but urgently necessary. From the opening lines of the *TIE* to the closing remarks of the *E* as well as the unfinished *TP*, it is clear that he was mainly concerned to deliver a philosophy enabling man to develop a certain way of life. The well-known opening lines of the *TIE*, arguably the earliest philosophical statement by Spinoza currently at our disposal, are perfectly straightforward:

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which could be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity.¹

At several junctures in the *E*, Spinoza made sure his readers would not lose sight of its essentially practical purpose, first and most notably at the end of the second part, where he appears to acknowledge that it becomes high time to oblige his readers, who so far have only been presented with highly detailed analyses of the concepts of God and Mind. After having destroyed the notion of a ‘free will’, he addresses the issue of the ultimate aim of the *E* and argues ‘how much knowledge of this doctrine is to our advantage in life’. The obvious objection that without the presupposition of some degree of human liberty no meaningful exhortation, let alone a genuine *E* is possible, is retorted by insisting that the doctrine that denies the freedom of the will is highly beneficial,

insofar as it teaches that we act only from God’s command, that we share in the divine nature, and that we do this the more, the more perfect our

¹ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 7. I have profited from Barbarac, *Spinoza et la science mathématique du salut*. On the opening lines of the *TIE*, see Zweerman, *L’Introduction à la philosophie selon Spinoza* and Moreau, *Spinoza*, Part I.

actions are, and the more and more we understand God. This doctrine, then, in addition to giving us complete peace of mind, also teaches us wherein our greatest happiness, *or* blessedness, consists: viz. in the knowledge of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise.

Second, Spinoza claims that his philosophy teaches us how we must bear ourselves ‘concerning matters of fortune, *or* things which are not in our power’, and third it contributes, or so Spinoza holds, ‘to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one, to disesteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry at no one, to envy no one’. Finally, Spinoza argues, ‘this doctrine also contributes, to no small extent, to the common society insofar as it teaches how citizens are to be governed and led, not so that they might be slaves, but that they may do freely the things that are best.’²

2. *Mathematical Certainty*

On the assumption that the main goal of his entire philosophical project was indeed a practical one and considering the particular shape of the *E*, no other conclusion seems warranted than that it was Spinoza’s principal aim to construct a moral philosophy able to meet the most rigorous standards of scientific scrutiny available at the time. The immense prestige of mathematics during the seventeenth century and its particular prominence in the Netherlands are well established: faced by the challenge to provide the emerging Republic with indigenous engineers and steersmen, capable of constructing fortifications and manning a fleet, the Dutch Republic established a string of first-class educational facilities in which mathematics played a key role.³ By the middle of the century, this essentially practical need for professional competence had rendered a high level of expertise in mathematics, that has been linked both with Grotius’ attempts to design a ‘geometric’ theory of natural law and with the particular success Cartesianism enjoyed in the Netherlands as the most successful exponent of *‘philosophia nova’*. But the allure of mathematics went beyond the opposition between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ philosophies of nature. The traditional picture of the essential inability of Renaissance Aristotelianism to accommodate mathematics has now become largely redundant and as Paul Richard Blum

² Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 490–491.

³ See most notably Mancosu, *Philosophy of Mathematics*, and for the Dutch context Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 1.

has recently demonstrated, the contemporary status of mathematics could also seduce a French Jesuit such as Honoré Fabri, who until 1680 acted for several decades as *Poenitentiarius* ('confessor')—a position of considerable legal and political power) at St. Peter's in Rome, to compose a Peripatetic metaphysics and physics '*more geometrico*', just to bring out the 'true meaning' of Aristotle's words.⁴

So Spinoza's regard for mathematics was perfectly in accordance with contemporary feelings, especially in the Netherlands. Immediately following the second part of the *E*, the preface to the third part, 'Of the Origin and Nature of the Affects' raises the issue of the method employed by Spinoza in his analysis of the human condition. This has become a particularly famous passage since it is one of the few in the *E* in which Spinoza himself comments on the geometrical method employed in this, his chief work. The first reference in the *E* to mathematics occurs in the appendix to the first part, where Spinoza dismantles the prejudice 'that God himself directs all things to some certain end' since 'God has made all things for man'. This prejudice survived because man convinced himself that he was unable to explain how it could be 'that conveniences and inconveniences happen indiscriminately to the pious and the impious alike', because 'the judgements of the gods far surpass man's grasp'. Today, Spinoza claims, this prejudice has been overcome, and one of the factors to which we owe this triumph was 'mathematics', that has shown men 'another standard of truth'. Apparently, mathematics was able to accomplish this, since it 'is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures'.⁵

The context of the preface to the third part of the *E*, in which these preliminary comments return, is straightforward enough in that after having established in the first two parts a metaphysics and a philosophy of mind, Spinoza is now on the verge of delivering his philosophical psychology, that will culminate in what could be called a 'cognitive therapy', designed to lead to the state of happiness or blessedness mentioned above. The results achieved so far are clear: everything that exists besides Nature as such, is part of and produced by Nature, and acts according to the immutable laws of Nature. Man, being no exception—no '*imperium in imperio*' as both the *E* (III, Praef.) and the *TP* (II, 6) put it—is just as much a part

⁴ Wallace, *Galileo and His Sources*; Feingold, 'The Oxford Curriculum'; Blum, 'Aristotelianism *more geometrico*'.

⁵ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 439–441.

and product of Nature as, say, trees or clouds are. The separate modes of Nature are to be distinguished first by the attributes of Nature that actually produce them, and second by their relative complexity. A tree is produced by the attribute of Extension, an idea is produced by the attribute of Thought, and while your average rock, owing to the specific relationship between its constitutive parts, is relatively simple, a human being is relatively complex.⁶

The complexity of man is mirrored, or: expressed in the particularly lively *interaction* between the human mode and the rest of Nature, resulting in affects, that in view of the ubiquitous nature of the eternal laws of Nature follow Nature just as much as trees do or clouds. ‘The Affects, therefore’, Spinoza concludes in the preface to the third part of the *E*,

of hate, anger, envy, etc., considered in themselves, follow with the same necessity and force of Nature as the other singular things. And therefore they acknowledge certain causes, through which they are understood, and have certain properties, as worthy of our knowledge as the properties of any other thing, by the mere contemplation of which we are pleased. Therefore I shall treat the nature and powers of the Affects, and the power of the Mind over them, by the same Method by which, in the preceding parts, I treated God and the Mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a Question of lines, planes, and bodies.⁷

So according to Spinoza, the way in which man’s affective life will be analysed in the third part of the *E* will not be different from the way in which God and the human mind have been dealt with in the preceding parts. This was, then, Spinoza’s way of reiterating his ambition to formulate a truly scientific moral philosophy.

This ambition has raised several questions, the first of which concerns the seventeenth-century connotation of ‘science’, since the sciences as we now know them simply did not exist at the time. Projecting onto the seventeenth century modern attempts to demarcate between the sciences and alternative, cognitive approaches to the world is hazardous to say the least. A well-established body of knowledge concerning the natural world including man, that could lay claim to widespread adherence among a significant number of leading authorities on the matter, was only just beginning to emerge in the second half of the seventeenth century. It was only during Spinoza’s lifetime that in London and Paris the first two major

⁶ See the postulates preceding *E*, II, 14: *Collected Works*, 462.

⁷ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 492.

'scientific' societies were established. Our assessment of the seventeenth-century practice of what today could still be recognised as 'science' is also fraught with difficulties because, for one, it was largely in the hands of people who by modern standards were essentially 'amateurs'.⁸ With the exception of professional practitioners such as astronomers and physicians, 'natural philosophers' as a rule were mainly preoccupied with teaching, since they were employed by universities that in the early modern age were simply not equipped to facilitate research. In the early modern age, research in the natural sciences took all sorts of shapes and even among the experts opinion varied widely as to what could count as a convincing scientific argument in the first place.⁹ It was only during the early decades of the eighteenth century that some sort of consensus was reached both on the right method to study nature and on the basic structure of the universe, for it was not until the European breakthrough of Newtonian natural philosophy that most notably the seventeenth-century clash between the 'old' and the 'new' philosophy was brought to a settlement.¹⁰

Then again, all this has little bearing on Spinoza's conception of his own efforts since to his mind mathematical certainty was far superior to any competing claim to certainty, as had already become evident from his use of the concept in the *TPP*. Its opening pages are dedicated to the distinction between the moral certainty upon which the prophets based their claims and 'certainty involved in natural knowledge', that is 'knowledge that we acquire by the natural light of reason'.¹¹ In the same chapter, this is also called 'true knowledge', that is 'vera scientia'¹²—which is further specified as the ability to explain something 'through its first causes'.¹³ The main difference between prophecy and natural knowledge, Spinoza continues in the next chapter, consists in the fact that 'the certainty afforded by prophecy was not a mathematical, but only a moral certainty'.¹⁴

In view of the subjects dealt with in the *TPP*, Spinoza naturally concentrates on the characteristics of moral certainty, but occasionally

⁸ Pyenson and Sheets-Pyenson, *Servants of Nature*. On the rise of the life sciences, in particular in the Netherlands, see Cook, *Matters of Exchange*.

⁹ See, most famously, Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* and Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*.

¹⁰ Some recent titles: Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution* and *De herschepping van de wereld*; Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*; Dear, *Revolutionizing the Sciences*. For a fine Dutch introduction, see Vermij, *De wetenschappelijke revolutie*.

¹¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 59.

¹² Spinoza, *Opera*, III, 13.

¹³ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 72.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

mathematical certainty is further elaborated upon.¹⁵ It is, or so Spinoza tells us, ‘the certainty that necessarily derives from the apprehension of what is apprehended or seen’ (‘quae ex necessitate perceptionis rei perceptae, aut visae sequitur’).¹⁶ Thus it is supposed to stand in contrast to the essentially subjective nature of moral certainty, that is always dependent on the personality of the individual prophet. Similarly, in the ensuing distinction between faith and philosophy, crucial of course to the entire argument of the *TTP*, Spinoza only rarely clarifies what philosophy in his eyes amounts to. All the attention goes to a clear analysis of faith, which is interesting enough for our purposes, for in the course of this analysis Spinoza equates ‘philosophical’ and ‘mathematical’ certainty, arguing in Chapter 14, that when God spoke from Mount Sinai to the Israelites, ‘the voice which the Israelites heard could not have given those men a philosophical or mathematical certainty of God’s existence’.¹⁷

In the course of the subsequent discussion of the differences between theology and philosophy, Spinoza is equally unwilling to say much about what true philosophy actually is. He does, however, expressly warn against those who are not content to base theology on moral certainty, but who instead ‘are aiming to prove the truth and authority of theology by mathematical demonstrations’. Not only are these ‘rationalist’ theologians guilty of depriving reason of the natural light of its authority, they also reveal their own insecurity:

While they are aiming to prove the truth and authority of theology by mathematical demonstrations and to prove the truth and to deprive reason and the natural light by its authority, they are simply drawing theology into the domain of reason, and are quite clearly implying that her authority has no brilliance unless it is illuminated by the natural light of reason.¹⁸

3. Form, Content, Method, Exposition

For a long time experts have wrestled with the question what to make of what according to the title of the *E* Spinoza’s *ordo geometricus* actually amounts to.¹⁹ Should it be regarded as the *necessary* form of Spinoza’s phi-

¹⁵ On the notion of ‘moral certainty’, see Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*, Chapter 4.

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologicopoliticus*, 75 (*Opera*, III, 32).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁹ See Steenbakkers, *Spinoza’s Ethica*, Chapter 5 and, more recently Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, Chapter 2.

losophy or merely as a rhetorical device? In principle, we should sharply distinguish between two separate issues at stake: how did Spinoza himself regard the *ordo geometricus* and how does it relate to his philosophy from a strictly philosophical point of view? How Spinoza felt about it is, however, extremely difficult to ascertain given the scarcity of his comments on the matter. This much is clear, that Spinoza's first two books, both the *TIE* and the *ST* only show glimpses of the *ordo geometricus*, and it was only in the composition of the *E* that Spinoza first turned to it, as becomes evident from his letter of September 1661 to Henry Oldenburg, in which he tells his friend that as regards the most basic truths about God and substance, 'I can think of no better expedient than to arrange them in geometrical style and to submit them to the bar of your judgement'.²⁰ Evidently, Oldenburg was sent a first draft of the opening part of what was to become the *E* (which he admired, but which also puzzled him, as becomes evident from his reply, Letter 3). Again, however, Spinoza is disappointingly brief in his presentation of this highly peculiar style, and I'm afraid there is not a single passage in his own writings that allows for a decision to be taken on the matter of Spinoza's own perception of the philosophical relevance of the *mos geometricus*.

The most persuasive philosophical argument in favour of an intimate connection between form and content of the *E* is supplied by Spinoza's view on causality, for having arrived at what some scholars regard as the expression of his absolute necessitarianism,²¹ according to which every natural event is the necessary result of God's power or 'nature', Spinoza concludes, in the *scholium* to *E*, I, 17:

I think I have shown clearly enough (...) that from God's supreme power, or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e., all things, have necessarily flowed, or always follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles.²²

Now it could be argued that, following Spinoza's earlier comments in the *TIE* on a true *definition* that captures the *essence* of a thing, enabling us to deduce its properties, as well as on the proper order to *organize* true ideas,²³ and in particular after his deduction in *E*, II, 7 of the necessary 'parallelism' between 'things' and 'ideas', a truly 'geometric' deduction of

²⁰ Spinoza, *Letters*, 62 (Letter 2).

²¹ Garrett, 'Spinoza's Necessitarianism'.

²² Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 426.

²³ *Ibid.*, 39–429 (*TIE*, 94–103).

ideas that captures the *causal* nexus we call ‘the world’, would have to be considered as providing a *logical* representation of the causal structure of reality. According to this interpretation, a philosopher is able to deduce ‘ideas’ logically from the all-inclusive idea of God, on the same basis on which ‘things’ are causally produced by God. As a consequence, or so this line of reasoning goes, Spinoza was forced to adopt the *mos geometricus* by the very contents of his metaphysics.

In support of this strong reading of the meaning of the *mos geometricus*, one could point to Lodewijk Meyer’s preface to Spinoza’s 1663 introduction to Cartesianism, in which Meyer claims that:

the best and surest Method of seeking and teaching the truth in the Sciences is that of the Mathematicians, who demonstrate their Conclusions from Definitions, Postulates and Axioms (...) For since a certain and firm knowledge of anything unknown can only be derived from things known certainly beforehand, these things must be laid down at the start, as a stable foundation on which to build the whole edifice of human knowledge, otherwise it will soon collapse of its own accord, or be destroyed by the slightest blow.²⁴

According to Meyer, the geometric style delivers a genuine method, uniquely capable of discovering truths. However, Meyer’s preface does not introduce Spinoza’s Moral Philosophy. On the contrary, the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* is exclusively concerned with Cartesian metaphysics and physics. Although I fully concur with Jonathan Israel’s recent proposal to regard the *PPC* as an essentially *Spinozan* exercise, designed not to spread Cartesianism but rather to pave the way for the acceptance of Spinoza’s own philosophy,²⁵ Edwin Curley was surely right in calling for caution: we know that Spinoza agreed with the publication of Meyer’s text, but this does not necessarily entail his complete agreement with its contents.²⁶ What is more, as Jonathan Bennett observed, Spinoza also published his *PPC* ‘demonstrated in a geometric manner’, while it is obvious that he himself rejected some of its ‘demonstrated’ conclusions.²⁷

This is not the only reason for doubt concerning the relevance of the *mos geometricus* for the *E*, for as far as Spinoza’s personal attitude toward the *ordo geometricus* is concerned, we know for a fact that the final text of the *E* differs considerably from its earlier, manuscript versions, in particular as regards its logical layout. Spinoza, for instance, seems to have

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 224–225.

²⁵ Israel, ‘Spinoza as an Expounder, Critic, and “Reformer” of Descartes’.

²⁶ Curley, ‘Spinoza’s Geometric Method’.

²⁷ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 19.

found it very difficult to distinguish between ‘axioms’ and some of the more basic ‘propositions’. Furthermore, the exact nature of Spinoza’s necessitarianism has not gone undisputed. It almost goes without saying that Spinoza was a determinist: according to Spinoza every event is the result of laws of nature that causally determine everything that happens. But several scholars, including Edwin Curley and Jonathan Bennett, have argued that Spinoza is not at all committed to the subsequent conclusion that everything that happens is logically necessary.²⁸ For not only does Spinoza make a sharp distinction between the necessity of a thing ‘by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause’ (*E*, I, 33schol.1),²⁹ which affects the ‘necessary’ existence of finite modes in particular, but if Spinoza is committed to necessitarianism, at least two more pretty nasty problems remain. First, Spinoza makes a distinction between essences that involve necessary existence and those that do not. Now if Spinoza is indeed a necessitarian, what, then, are we to make of *E*, II, ax.1, according to which ‘the essence of man does not involve necessary existence, i.e. from the order of nature it can happen that this or that man does exist, or that he does not exist’?³⁰ What could this possibly mean if the actual existence of any particular man or woman is in reality a logically necessary truth? And second, on a necessitarian reading of the *E* Spinoza’s distinction between the essential and non-essential properties of, again, especially finite modes also seems to become questionable to say the least. What kind of property could a really existing non-essential property be in a universe in which everything that exists is not only physically but also logically necessary?

Furthermore, even if we accept the interpretation according to which Spinoza was indeed an absolute necessitarian, this reading of the *E* does not by itself entail the necessity of adopting a geometric style of *expressing* necessitarianism. Indeed, if there was only one, essentially privileged form of expression available to Spinoza’s philosophy, this would imply the impossibility of translating it successfully into any other form. Spinoza’s other books besides the *E* as well as his correspondence, and I would argue even some of the more accomplished twentieth-century commentaries on the *E*, are in many ways just as successful in delivering his philosophy as the *E* is. As a consequence, to my mind Piet Steenbakkers and Steven Nadler were right in concluding that even on a strong reading of

²⁸ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, 111–124; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 48–50 and Curley and Walski, ‘Spinoza’s Necessitarianism Reconsidered’.

²⁹ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 436.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 447.

Spinoza's views on the relationship between causality and logic, the *mos geometricus* to his mind probably represented the most *appropriate* rather than the uniquely qualified form for the exposition of Spinozism.

4. *Geulincx and Spinoza*

The next issue to be addressed concerns Spinoza's originality in writing a mathematical moral philosophy. On the one hand, there can be little doubt that the model on which Spinoza worked was supplied by Descartes, for it was Descartes who in the Preface to the *Passions de l'Ame* had proposed to explain the human passions *not* 'en Orateur, ny mesme en Philosophe moral, mais seulement en Physicien'—'en physicien', as a physicist.³¹ And even more to the point, it had been Descartes who in his replies to the second objections to the *Meditations* had turned to Euclid for help in providing a mathematical demonstration of the existence of God. However, as will be only too familiar, Descartes was reticent about further developing this particular method as a tool for metaphysics, and would not repeat the experiment.³²

Over the last few years, moreover, research into the specific relationship between Descartes and Spinoza has clearly emphasised the essential *differences* between their respective systems of metaphysics as well as their theories of knowledge, and Dutch Cartesians were hardly impressed by Spinoza's use of the *mos geometricus*.³³ Theo Verbeek has recently called attention to the Leiden Cartesian Christopher Wittichius, whose *Anti-Spinoza* of 1690 copied the layout of the *E* only in order to comprehensively refute it. Wittichius felt that whereas Spinoza should of course have used the analytic method, the *E* actually employs the synthetic method. Quoting the *TIE*, according to which 'the right way of discovery is to form thoughts from some given definition. This will proceed more successfully and easily the better we have defined a thing',³⁴ Wittichius argued that, despite appearances, in the *E* Spinoza simply could not live up to this promise since he failed to depart from clear and distinct definitions that were grounded in reality.³⁵ Similar objections, it should be added,

³¹ Descartes, *Oeuvres*, XII, 326.

³² Descartes, *Oeuvres*, VII, 160–170. See Doney, 'The Geometrical Presentation'.

³³ See, for instance, Nadler, 'Spinoza and the Downfall of Cartesianism'.

³⁴ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 39.

³⁵ Verbeek, 'Wittich's Critique of Spinoza'. See also Savini, 'Notes au sujet de la publication de L'Anti-Spinoza'; Van Bunge, 'Cartesiaanse kritiek op *Ethica* II'.

to Spinoza's method and to the use it made of definitions had been voiced earlier by such critics as the Mennonite Adriaen Verwer and the Socinian Frans Kuyper, and as we shall see, this point would later be taken up by the Dutch *empiricist* philosopher Bernard Nieuwentijt.³⁶

This is not to say that Spinoza's moral philosophy had no Dutch equivalents. Although the large majority of Dutch Cartesians concentrated on natural philosophy, including medicine, in particular Arnold Geulincx's *Ethica* from 1665, recently translated and published by Brill, reveals several points of genuine affinity.³⁷ Han van Ruler has pointed to several significant similarities between Geulincx and Spinoza, including their account of the way in which all knowledge derives from the physical interaction between the body and its material surroundings. Secondly, both philosophers drew very similar distinctions between the 'active' and the 'passive' way in which we are affected by the external world, after which both pointed to reason as the unique instrument enabling man to realise genuine happiness and virtue by *understanding* our causal dependence on the rest of the world. Finally, both men's moral philosophies are ultimately directed toward the realization of *amor Dei*, the love of God.³⁸

In view of Spinoza's likely connections with Leiden university during the early 1660s, where at the time Geulincx held a chair, speculations about a relationship between the two philosophers have continued to inspire several experts from the late nineteenth century onwards. Some have even argued that Geulincx was affected by Spinoza's views, which may have been known to him either through personal contacts or manuscripts that had started to circulate by that time.³⁹ Recently it has been suggested that as far as Spinoza's response to Geulincx is concerned, we are best advised to concentrate not on the *E* but on the *KV*, the *ST* that is, which appears to date from his early days at Rijnsburg near Leiden.⁴⁰ The second part of the *ST*, on man and his passions, is obviously inspired by Descartes' *Passions de l'Ame*, but it is also marked by a highly un-Cartesian, and as many have argued Platonic denial of any role of the body as a cause of the passions, which may well have been inspired by Geulincx. In particular Spinoza's insistence on the need to include our natural self-interest that is based on

³⁶ Verwer, 't Mom-Aensicht der Atheistry, 17 ff.; Kuyper, *Weerlegging van de voor-naamste gronden*, 75 ff. See Klijnsmit, 'Spinoza en Verwer' and Petry, 'Kuyper's Analysis of Spinoza's Axiomatic Method'.

³⁷ Geulincx, *Ethics*.

³⁸ Van Ruler, 'Kennen, lijden, handelen'.

³⁹ See, for instance, Rousset, *Geulincx entre Descartes et Spinoza*.

⁴⁰ Allderink, 'Spinoza and Geulincx'.

love of our body in our progression toward a virtuous life, seems aimed at Geulincx's denial of the moral significance of this natural love of the self.

Yet the differences with Geulincx remain fundamental, despite eighteenth-century attempts by Ruardus Andala and Jean-Pierre de Crousaz to associate the two philosophers, if only since Geulincx was adamant in his conviction that both God's and man's will are free. What is more, Geulincx does not in any way use the *mos geometricus*. He does, in a rather customary manner, extol the virtues of mathematics, pointing out that it is:

worthy of note that those disciplines which are the greatest cultivators of palpable Truths (...) such as Geometry and Arithmetic (...) have to this day, throughout so many centuries, remained pure and undefiled, not only by errors, but even by conjectures, opinions, and suspicions, whilst other less rigorous disciplines have lapsed into numerous errors, and if possible, into mere opinions, conjectures, trifles, and daydreams.⁴¹

But to Geulincx's mind the chief purpose of the practice of mathematics is propaedeutic in that it coaches reason. It only prepares the intellect for its real assignment, that consists of rational self-inspection, compared to which mathematics remains necessarily abstract:

the demonstrations that we discovered in the course of inspecting ourselves have far more force than those of Mathematics, being concerned with the things that are naturally best known to us, that is, ourselves and our thoughts, which are in themselves necessarily clearest of all to us, and only accidentally obscured by our prejudices; an obscurity easily dispelled by serious acute, and frequent inspection of ourselves, and by self-communing.⁴²

5. Locke and Spinoza

During the latter half of the seventeenth century, the allure of mathematics was not confined to Continental 'Cartesians' such as Spinoza and Geulincx. Hobbes' infatuation with Euclid is well established. No biographical account of 'the Monster of Malmesbury' can dispense with the passage in John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, relating how, in 1630 in Geneva, Hobbes 'was in a gentleman's house in which a copy of Euclid's Elements lay open on a desk...'⁴³ It was argued long ago already that also Locke's theory

⁴¹ Geulincx, *Ethics*, 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 241–242.

⁴³ Martinich, *Hobbes*, 81. See also Grant, 'Hobbes and Mathematics'; Jesseph, *Squaring the Circle*; Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, Chapter 5.

of knowledge ‘is essentially a mathematical one as that of Descartes’, if only since his analysis of both ‘demonstrative’ and ‘intuitive knowledge’ is modelled on mathematics.⁴⁴

What is more, in the third book of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* Locke famously asserted:

I am bold to think, that *Morality is capable of Demonstration*, as well as Mathematicks: Since the precise real Essence of the Things Moral Words stand for, may be perfectly known; and so the Congruity or Incongruity of the Things themselves, be certainly discovered, in which consists perfect Knowledge.⁴⁵

In the fourth book, Locke is more specific: a mathematical morality, he claims, could be achieved on the basis of two ideas in particular:

The Idea of a supreme Being, infinite in Power, Goodness, and Wisdom, whose Workmanship we are, and on whom we depend; and the *Idea* of our selves, as understanding, rational Beings, being such as are clear in us, would I suppose, if duly considered, and pursued, afford such Foundations of our Duty and Rules of Action, as might place *Morality among the Sciences capable of Demonstration*: wherein I doubt not, but from self-evident Propositions, by necessary Consequences, as incontestable as those in Mathematicks, the measures of right and wrong be made out...⁴⁶

One of the examples Locke gives of what such a moral philosophy would look like runs as follows:

Where there is no Property, there is no Injustice, is a Proposition as certain as any Demonstration in *Euclid*: For the *Idea of Property*, being a right to any thing; and the *Idea* to which the Name *Injustice* is given, being the Invasion or Violation of that right, it is evident, that these *Ideas* being thus established, and these Names annexed to them, I can as certainly know this Proposition to be true, as That a Triangle has three Angles equal to two right ones.⁴⁷

When his good friend William Molyneux continued to urge Locke to actually write a mathematical morality, the latter had to admit that while it had to be deemed feasible, ‘yet, whether I am able so to make it out is another question’.⁴⁸ It is not difficult to see why Locke had started to worry, for shouldn’t we just admit that moral concepts are *not* unambiguous? And

⁴⁴ Gibson, ‘Locke’s Theory of Mathematical Knowledge’, 38.

⁴⁵ Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, III, xi, 16, 516.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, iii, 18, 549.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, iii, 18, 549–550.

⁴⁸ Locke, *Correspondence*, IV, 524: 22 September 1692, to William Molyneux.

did Locke really feel, or are we really to believe that to behave cruelly toward, say, a homeless beggar, does not imply ‘injustice’?⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Locke’s position differs fundamentally from Spinoza’s in that according to Locke, the moral order is constituted by God’s will.⁵⁰ Consequently, Locke was also presented with the issue that of course never bothered Spinoza of how to ensure that the outcome of man’s spontaneous construction of complex ideas corresponds to the contents of God’s will.⁵¹ After a few years of further meditation on the matter Locke concluded the project was perhaps not as urgent as he once thought, since ‘the Gospel contains so perfect a body of Ethics that reason may be excused from the enquiry, since she may find man’s duty clearer and easier in revelation than in herself’.⁵² This might look as a rather odd episode in Locke’s intellectual biography, but recent debate among Locke-scholars suggests otherwise in that it may well be indicative of a crucial issue relating to the ultimate coherence of Locke’s legacy. For if the epistemological nominalism developed in the *Essay* cannot be reconciled with Locke’s attempt to establish an objective moral order resulting from God’s will, the *Essay* not only implies a definite break with his earlier work on natural law, it also indicates the fundamental moral impotence of his theory of knowledge, that as a matter of fact was supposed to clarify the very ‘principles of morality and reveal Religion’.⁵³

6. Conclusion

Locke’s and Hobbes’ evident fascination with the promise of indubitable certainty as delivered by mathematics in general and geometry in particular seems to have been part of a wider tradition that was not necessarily affected by Cartesianism. Clearly, Locke’s ‘Way of Ideas’ was heavily

⁴⁹ Wilson, ‘The Moral Epistemology of Locke’s *Essay*’.

⁵⁰ Locke, *Essay*, II, xxviii, 8, 352: ‘That God has given a Rule whereby Men should govern themselves, I think there is no body so brutish to deny. He has s right to do it, we are his Creatures: He has Goodness and Wisdom to direct our Actions to that which is best: and he has Power to enforce it by Rewards and Punishments, of infinite weight and duration, in another Life: for no body can take us out of his hands. This is the only true touchstone of moral Rectitude ...’

⁵¹ Schneewind, ‘Locke’s Moral Philosophy’ and *The Invention of Autonomy*, Chapter 8; Verbeek, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, Chapter 2.

⁵² Locke, *Correspondence* V, 595, 30 March/5 April 1696, to William Molyneux.

⁵³ An interesting attempt to salvage Locke’s position can be found in Colman, ‘Locke’s Empiricist Theory of the Law of Nature’.

indebted to Cartesian epistemology, but in England even decided opponents of Cartesianism such as the Cambridge Platonists regarded the non-empirical world of ideal geometrical figures as a real, that is really existing, world rendering indubitable moral insights, and seventeenth-century natural law theorists from Grotius onward were also actively engaged to counter Aristotle's claim that moral philosophy was only capable of delivering moral certainty, as was demonstrated famously, for instance, by Jean Barbeyrac in the Preface to his highly influential 1706 edition and translation of Samuel Pufendorf's *De Iure Naturae et Gentium* (1672).⁵⁴ Barbeyrac was haunted by the spectre of scepticism, and would even become obsessed by the ambition to root out Bayle's 'Pyrrhonim' in particular.

What all these seventeenth-century authors including Spinoza, who does not seem to have been particularly concerned by the 'Sceptical Challenge' had in common was a shared aversion to 'sectarianism' and its disastrous consequences. As Catherine Wilson recently put it:

Traditionally, formulating a moral philosophy had been a matter of which sect to follow. The Epicureans defended atomism and pleasure; the Stoics attacked Epicurean hedonism and defended Providence and a world-spirit; the Platonists held to the Forms, including the Form of the Good; the Aristotelians, to form and matter and *eudaimonia*, and so on. Seventeenth-century philosophers insisted that they were discarding the old model for selecting ontologies. They looked admiringly on the consensus of mathematics and on the beginning consensus in experimental science. The quest for "certitude" meant the quest for undisputed knowledge, which, by definition, could not be sectarian.⁵⁵

Both in the new-born Dutch Republic and in Restoration England, 'sectarianism' was mainly associated with religious and political conflicts. Despite his singular lack of interest in the 'sceptical challenge', Spinoza shared the ambition to find a level at which these tensions could be laid to rest with several other early protagonists of the Radical Enlightenment including Lodewijk Meyer, who launched his infamous *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, declaring that it was his aim to put an end to both theological and political strife resulting from competing interpretations of Scripture.⁵⁶ But Meyer's attempt immediately became the subject of a huge polemic

⁵⁴ Rétat, *Le Dictionnaire de Bayle*, 39–43; Hochstrasser, 'Conscience and Reason'. See, however, also Mautner, 'Grotius and the Skeptics'.

⁵⁵ Wilson, 'The Moral Epistemology of Locke's *Essay*', 399. See, however, also Jacob, *The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution*.

⁵⁶ Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 91–100. See also Bordoli, *Ragione e Scritura* and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 11.

itself, and while the Royal Society preferred to avoid discussing politics and religion directly, and Locke only briefly entertained the idea of a truly scientific moral philosophy, and while Geulincx restricted the use of mathematics in moral philosophy to an essentially propaedeutic exercise, Spinoza alone actually *accomplished* the composition of an *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*.

As long as we regard Spinoza's use of the *mos geometricus* merely as a form of exposition, the assessment of its suitability raises more fundamental problems in Locke's moral philosophy than it does in Spinoza's. Yet the *E* would soon be attacked violently for its mathematical pretensions by empiricist philosophers such as the Dutchman Bernard Nieuwentijt. After having published his extremely popular physico-theology, entitled *Het regt gebruik der wereltbeschouwingen* (1715) and translated into French, German and English, Nieuwentijt completed his assault on the rise of unbelief by adding a scientific 'methodology', entitled *Gronden van zekerheid* (1720), in which he argued that Spinoza's use of the geometrical method was flawed since it ignored the crucial distinction between abstract mathematical truths and mathematical truths about real objects.⁵⁷ Unlike 'pure', that is abstract truths without material contents, the latter category, or so Nieuwentijt claimed, have to be confirmed by experience. Spinoza's mistake, or so Nieuwentijt argued, had been to present essentially tautological that is solely verbal truths as if they were concerned with the real world. By reiterating and further elaborating upon a critique that had already been voiced by the distinguished Cartesian philosopher Christopher Wittichius as well as by minor authors such as Verwer and Kuyper, Nieuwentijt not only paved the way for Hume's distinction between 'Relations of Ideas' and 'Matters of Fact', his work also contributed crucially to the demise of the radical and the triumph of the moderate Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Nieuwentijt, *Gronden van zekerheid*, 244 ff. See Petry, 'Nieuwentijt's Criticism of Spinoza'; Vermij, *Secularisering en natuurwetenschap*, 83–88.

⁵⁸ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, Chapter 15.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPINOZA AND THE COLLEGIANTS

Since the publication of Meinsma's *Spinoza en zijn kring* it is considered a fact that Spinoza was friends with Collegiants such as Simon Joosten de Vries, Pieter Balling and Jarig Jelles. Fokke Akkerman and Piet Steenbakkers have subsequently shown how important Balling and Jelles were as editors and translators of Spinoza's work, and that they helped him where they could, especially after he had been expelled.¹ But when we look at their works our account may be brief: Pieter Balling's *Een Ligt* from 1662 is, first and foremost, a very short text, which is, moreover, very vague; Jarig Jelles, whose 1684 confession shows some traces of Spinozism, is no less ambiguous; and the only really outspoken Spinozist among the Collegiants, Johannes Bredenburg from Rotterdam, did not want to become a Spinozist at all, and his 'coming out' was the cause of a long-lasting schism within the movement of the Collegiants. The brothers and sisters who took Bredenburg's point of view mainly seem to have done so because they believed in the sincerity of Bredenburg's struggle with Spinoza's work.² Moreover, it has thus far never been made likely that Spinoza was particularly open-minded towards the theology of the Collegiants—not least because the Collegiants did not have a clearly distinct theology. Collegiants were individualists, who often felt strongly attracted to spiritualistic and chiliastic varieties of reformed Christianity which were and remained essentially foreign to Spinoza.

Nevertheless, this does not explain everything. Searching for a form of theological impact one might overlook the fact that the Collegiants' significance for Spinoza was not so much theological as political.³ Their impact would be felt not in Spinoza's theology or metaphysics, but rather in his political theory. Before I try to explain this in further detail, I must first expressly state how much I owe to Frank Mertens' and Siep

¹ Akkerman, *Studies in the Posthumous Works*; Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica*.

² Van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691)*.

³ This was first suggested by the Austrian professor of law Adolf Menzel in his debate with Willem Meijer. See Meijer, 'Wie sich Spinoza zu den Collegianten verhielt' and Menzel, 'Spinoza und die Collegianten'.

Stuurman's work with regard to this insight.⁴ Briefly stated, I think Spinoza's political theory and more in particular his preference for democracy was to a major degree prepared by the debate among Collegiants about what they called the 'equality' of believers. That debate first had a political connotation in the initiatives of the Collegiant Pieter Cornelis Plockhoy, who came from the province of Zeeland. Subsequently it received a further secular turn in Franciscus van den Enden's work. But first let me discuss the Collegiant movement.

1. *Rijnsburger Collegiants*

The Collegiant movement came into existence at the beginning of the seventeenth century as a direct result of the Synod of Dordt, when resolute Arminians in and around Rijnburg decided they would no longer have their meetings conducted by a minister. For, they decided, rather than still be led by an—illicitly operating—Remonstrant minister, let alone by a Contra-Remonstrant, we will teach each other. The Van der Kodde brothers from then on organized church meetings on their own. In this context they invoked the early history of the Reformation and a number of texts from the New Testament. The fourteenth chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians was quoted in particular, for apparently Paul had, in his time, also told followers who had to do without a minister to go about it themselves. As soon as the brothers Van der Kodde had furnished a house for their meetings it was referred to as a 'College' and the participants as 'Collegiants'. Their aim was mutual instruction, 'not in the way of preaching or education, but by way of mutual research and study of the meaning of Holy Scripture'.⁵

'Colleges' would be established in many places in the provinces of Holland and Friesland in the course of the seventeenth century, with Rijnsburg remaining the place where the Collegiants kept meeting each other twice a year.⁶ It was, among other things, unique to this movement that its adherents refused to draw up confessional writings or other 'Formularies of Unity'. Believers were rather admonished to experience their faith

⁴ Mertens: *Franciscus van den Enden's Brief Account*; Stuurman, *De uitvinding van de mensheid*.

⁵ [Van Nimwegen], *Historie der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*, 31.

⁶ Van Slee, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*; Hylkema, *Reformateurs*; Lindeboom, *Stiefkin-dieren van het Christendom*; Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église*, Chapters 2–4; Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*.

on an individual basis. Thus, the colleges in Amsterdam and Rotterdam in particular turned into gathering places where the most daring forms of seventeenth-century Protestantism could flourish. Although they were, as a rule, mainly attended by Remonstrants and Mennonites, Socinians attended happily as well and a number of Spinoza's best friends were also supposed to be Collegiants.⁷ Moreover, many 'Rijnsburgers' turned out to be especially interested in chiliastic or millenarian speculation.⁸ During the 1680s Johannes Bredenburg's sympathy for Spinoza's philosophy resulted in a temporary schism within this national movement, which was, however, solved in 1700. During the eighteenth century the movement lost some of its energy, although it would still fulfil a star part in the sixth part (1736) of Bernard Picart's famous *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*.⁹ Only around 1800 did the Rijnsburgers cease to exist as a movement.

Definitely egalitarian tendencies arose within this movement as early as around the middle of the seventeenth century. They were, first of all, the result of strong feelings of anti-clericalism. The aversion to the 'lust for power' of ministers was great and was continuously fed by numerous collisions with local ecclesiastical authorities. De Van der Kodde brothers had already told the ministers who had tried to keep the Rijnsburgers from their *Alleingang* that they had better 'learn a good trade'.¹⁰ The Collegiant Johan Hartigveld from Rotterdam wrote in his *Schriftuurlycke Waerdeering van het hedendaegsche Predicken* (Scriptural Critique of Modern-day Preaching): 'What else is the aim of the establishment of the Free Colleges and the Rijnsburg Meeting but to destroy by this establishment that dominating style of preaching?'¹¹ The Mennonite poet Joachim Oudaen, a friend of Hartigveld's, who is characterized by his biographer as a 'herald of tolerance', also went on the offensive as soon as ministers with lust for power came into his view.¹² There were just as many fierce controversies among Collegiants in Amsterdam about the question what

⁷ Kübler, *Het socinianisme in Nederland*; Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*. More recently: Knijff and Visser, *Bibliographia Sociniana*; Nadler, *Spinoza. A Life*.

⁸ Van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius*.

⁹ Picart, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, VI, 327–333. See also Hunt, Jacob, Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe*, 129–130; Sadler, 'The Collegiants'.

¹⁰ (De Fijne), *Kort, Waerachtig, en Getrouw Verhael*, 15.

¹¹ (Hartigveld), *Schriftuurlycke Waerdeering*, 32. See for the attribution to Hartigveld: Sandius, *Bibliotheca Anti-Trinitariorum*, 161.

¹² Melles, *Joachim Oudaen*. Cf. (Oudaen), *Aanmerkingen over het Verhaal*.

authority ministers should have. The so-called ‘Lammerenkrijg’ erupted in the 1650s: various colleges flourished in Amsterdam as well and there, too, the meetings attracted Remonstrants, Mennonites, but also Quakers, Socinians, chiliasts and others. The behaviour of the Mennonite minister Galenus Abrahamsz in particular became the subject of lengthy controversies, but similar conflicts arose in Utrecht, Leiden and Haarlem. After the placard against Socinianism was made public in 1653 by the States of Holland, many local colleges fell into disrepute and struggles about Mennonite orthodoxy flared up everywhere in the Republic.¹³

The Collegiants’ ideas about equality were, in addition, inspired by a pacifism which seemed somewhat Mennonite. Hartigveld argued in *De recht weerlooze Christen* (The Truly Defenceless Christian) that no Christian should ever dominate others, neither his fellow citizens, nor his servants, wife or children. In his opinion there was only one sovereign, Christ himself, whose kingdom, as is well known, is not part of this world.¹⁴ It was also fit for a Christian to try and be humble and patient when faced with injustice, and Hartigveld, the rich son of a mayor, put this into practice. He endowed the care for the poor with a large sum of money and consistently refused to be appointed in any government office.

The Collegiant belief in equality was finally inspired by a strong feeling of human fallibility. The Rijnsburgers often quoted the work by the Remonstrant theologian Simon Episcopius, the author of the Remonstrant creed: ‘God has nowhere made known that there should always be a referee in the Church who speaks unerringly, neither did He point out who should always be this referee.’¹⁵ The roots of this Reformational realization of fallibility are old—Coornhert’s work in particular would remain popular among Collegiants for a long time.¹⁶ Proponents of Galenus regarded human fallibility especially as something that had become true in the context of the decline of the church. This was a popular subject among the ‘stepchildren of Christianity’ during all of the seventeenth century: the Reformation had not succeeded in restoring the visible church of Christ and therefore the only point was the continuation of the invisible church. Galenus argued that, as there is ‘no express authority, order or assign-

¹³ Meihuizen, *Galenus Abrahamsz*.

¹⁴ (Hartigveld), *De recht weerlooze Christen*, Chapter 1. Hartigveld died in 1678. This older text was published posthumously by his Rotterdam friends. See Hartog, ‘Een echte collegiant’.

¹⁵ (Episcopius), *Belydenisse ofte Verklaringhe*, 41.

¹⁶ Voogt, “Anyone who can read may be a preacher”. See also Buys, *De kunst van het wendenken*.

ment of Christ the Lord himself to re-establish that visible church, free prophesies should be allowed, while awaiting the approaching Kingdom of Peace and living ‘in the fear of the Lord’.¹⁷

Pieter Balling, one of Galenus’ followers, who became known in particular as a confidant of Spinoza’s, wrote two pamphlets in the Lammeren-krijg. Galenus’ chiliasm does not appear in those pamphlets, whereas it can be found in Hartigveld’s and Oudaen’s work. Also the more rationalist-oriented Balling felt that the lack of certainty about the organization of the true church established the necessity for tolerance: the weakness of man does not allow us to silence others.¹⁸ According to Balling, the principle of equality had always prevailed among Mennonites, too.¹⁹ The Collegiant Laurens Klinkhamer, from Leiden, in his turn, talked of the same ‘veil of ignorance’ which was supposed to encompass all believers to an equal degree: ‘it therefore follows that no-one can endow himself with any right to decide alone about good or evil, or things being true or false’.²⁰

It was someone from Rotterdam, again, who pointed out the consequences of human fallibility in the most confronting way. Johannes Bredenburg, a brother-in-law of Oudaen’s, wrote two pamphlets about free prophecy: *Een Praetje over Tafel* (A Table Talk, 1671) and *Heylzamen Raad* (Wholesome Advice, 1672). The latter title in particular is worthwhile in this context because of the radical conclusion he draws in this text on the basis of the absence of a ‘speaking judge’:

The state in which we all presently are is no other than the state of collaterality or equality, which can be clearly deduced from the absence of any ultimate authority, or an acting judge, for if there were any ultimate authority, equality would be destroyed; but since there is no such thing, which is fully granted by all these Christians [that is, all Protestants, WvB], it follows that we are all on the same level, or equal.²¹

Bredenburg went so far as to put into perspective even the Collegiants’ own claims to truth on the Biblical basis of their meetings: apart from God, he argued, no one knows for sure what the consequences should be of texts such as 1 Cor. 14.²²

¹⁷ Abrahamsz. and Spruyt, *Nader verklaringe van de XIX artikelen*, 19. The *Bedenckingen* of 1657 have been added without pagination. The quote is to be found under the tenth article.

¹⁸ (Balling), *Verdediging*, 50–51; (Balling), *Nader Verdediging*, 28.

¹⁹ (Balling), *Verdediging*, 3.

²⁰ Klinkhamer, *Verdedigingh van de Vryheyt van Spreken*, 147.

²¹ Bredenburg, *Heylzamen Raad tot Christelyke Vrede*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

The remarkable part played by women within the Rotterdam colleges confirms that it is true that the egalitarian tendencies within the circle of Rotterdam Collegiants such as Hartigveld, Oudaen and Bredenburg had a certain emancipatory effect. Mayor Willem van der Aa's wife, a sister of Hartigveld's, was regularly seen there.²³ From the middle of the seventeenth century, women such as Maritge Soetemans organized meetings of their own, where ideas were exchanged about theological issues.²⁴ They invited guest speakers and travelled to the major meetings at Rijnsburg together. It would definitely seem that the Amsterdam college of Galenus was a stepping stone for the renowned prophet Antoinette Bourignon when she was confirmed in her own 'spiritual motherhood'.²⁵ The etiquette among the Collegiants is sometimes correctly referred to as 'democratic'. They avoided the use of titles, treasured humility, and addressed each other as 'brother' or 'sister'.²⁶

2. Plockhoy, Van den Enden and the Brothers Koerbagh

Pieter Cornelis Plockhoy, an activist from Zeeland, was the best known Collegiant who turned out to be willing to see social-political consequences resulting from the thought that all believers are really equal and that all 'lust for power' is therefore evil.²⁷ Much in his biography remains hidden, but it seems that he had his roots among Mennonites in Zeeland. He possibly departed from Zeeland with Galenus to Amsterdam. It is a fact that he was seen as a 'Galenist' there, but he also tried to get in touch with Oliver Cromwell in England in the course of the 1650s. Cromwell seems to have been seriously interested in Plockhoy's utopian project to establish co-operative communities for the poor in puritan England. The main source for Plockhoy's enterprise is the two pamphlets that he published in England. Although there seem to be millenarian incentives in his work, his main worry is likely to have been of another nature. He was concerned

²³ See, for instance, *Vriende-Praetjen over het Eeuwig Edict*, 5 and *Een Sociniaensche Consultatie tusschen Jan en Arent*, 4.

²⁴ Zijlmans, *Vriendenkringen in de zeventiende eeuw*, 99–126.

²⁵ De Baar, 'Ik moet spreken', Chapters 3 and 15.

²⁶ Hylkema, *Reformatoreurs*, II, 21.

²⁷ Horst, 'Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy'; Harder and Harder, *Plockhoy from Zurik-Zee; Séguy, Utopie Coopérative et Œcuménisme*; Harder, 'Pieter Plockhoy Revisited'. See also Frank Mertens' website on Franciscus van den Enden: <http://users.telenet.be/fvde/index.htm?Works1>.

with ‘the great inequality and disorder of men in the World’.²⁸ To start with, complete freedom of conscience should be declared: the colleges in Holland were a clear model of the theological practice that he envisioned for England. Moreover, as he concluded: ‘to deal equally in matters of Religion towards subjects, is not only good and pious, but is also the foundation of a good Government’.²⁹ Equal Christians should, in other words, be treated as equal subjects, that is: citizens of equal standing.

It may be useful to give this some further thought, because we, living in the twenty-first century, are not surprised by the thought that people are essentially equal. The famous first sentence of Thomas Jefferson’s American Declaration of Independence says: ‘We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal’, but in the seventeenth century this was still anything but ‘self-evident’.³⁰ On the contrary, it was a completely revolutionary insight, an insight that, I think, is still completely counter-intuitive even today: it is a fact that people have always lived everywhere and in circumstances that *make* them unequal. There are tremendous *differences* between people everywhere and at any time, and those differences are of a physical, economic, social and political nature. Siep Stuurman has therefore called his recent history of the ideas about equality *De uityvinding van de mensheid* (*The Invention of Mankind*). Mankind as an association of equal individuals could not be *discovered*, it had to be *invented*.³¹

To return to the Collegiants: Plockhoy’s plans came to nothing, as Cromwell died suddenly in 1658 and the Restoration was approaching. Nevertheless, his efforts would earn him a place in the historiography of socialism in England and the Netherlands.³² Back in Amsterdam the local authorities of that city in 1662 allowed him to set up an establishment on the banks of the Delaware. He had described his relevant plans in the *Kort en klaer ontwerp* (*Brief and Clear Design*). His idea was to establish—again—a co-operative community with sailors, fishermen, farmers and craftsmen in the New Netherlands. These people would build up a new existence on an equal footing. Obviously there would be complete freedom of religion. Just as he had proposed in England at an earlier stage,

²⁸ Zurik-Zee [Plockhoy], *A Way Propounded*, 1.

²⁹ Zurik-Zee [Plockhoy], *The Way to the Peace*, 8.

³⁰ http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence.

³¹ Stuurman, *De uityvinding van de mensheid*.

³² Beer, *A History of Socialism in Britain*, vol. I, 74–75. See also Quack, *De socialisten*, I, Chapter 8; Davis, *A Study of English Utopian Writing*, Chapter 11; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 177–180.

church meetings would have to follow the example set by the Collegiants. Again, Plockhoy's egalitarianism is remarkable. The inhabitants of his community would share all common yields and have to treat each other as equals. There could not be any social differences: 'The names of servant or maid are not in use among us (where each expects their share of the profit on an individual basis).'³³

The new establishment fared badly; only one and a half year after forty-one emigrants had set foot ashore the Hoerenkil in July 1663, the British army destroyed the establishment completely. A few Dutchmen seem to have survived the English attack, but there have been no traces of Plockhoy himself since. At home in Amsterdam, he had in the meantime become renowned. Not only were there rumours that in America he had pleaded in favour of polygamy, but he had also found a follower in Franciscus van den Enden, part of the same circle of which Pieter Balling who was also a member, namely Spinoza's circle.³⁴ Even before Plockhoy and his followers left for the New World, Van den Enden had described Plockhoy's project in great detail. Apparently he had become closely involved.

For as early as 1662 he published—although anonymously—a quite detailed *Kort Verhael* (Brief Account) about the special opportunities that Plockhoy's establishment offered.³⁵ The local authorities saw nothing in his ideas and there was also a rift between him and Plockhoy, but Van den Enden's plans were, then indeed, far-reaching. It had been known for a longer period of time that he played a main part in Spinoza's circle in the early 1660s, but thanks to Marc Bedjaï and Wim Klever we can attribute both the *Kort Verhael* and the *Vrye Politijke Stellingen* (Free Political Theses, 1664) to him.³⁶ The Collegiants' focus on the 'equality' of believers certainly took a secular turn in Van den Enden's work. His anti-clericalism must have shocked his contemporaries. Plockhoy at least acknowledged Christ's authority, but Van den Enden went a few steps further: the *Opdracht aen den vertrouwden Lezer* (Dedication to the Trusted

³³ Plockhoy van Zierikzee, *Kort en klaer ontwerp*, n.p.

³⁴ Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, Chapter 5.

³⁵ (Van den Enden), *Kort Verhael*. I use the edition made by Mertens: *Franciscus van den Enden's Brief Account*. In the introduction to *Vrye Politijke Stellingen* Van den Enden claims to have been asked to write the *Kort Verhael*: Van den Enden, *Vrije Politijke Stellingen*, 125. He also claimed never to have considered political philosophy before.

³⁶ Bedjaï, 'Métafysique, éthique et politique'; Klever, 'Proto-Spinoza Franciscus van den Enden'. See, however, Mertens, 'Franciscus van den Enden: tijd voor een herziening van diens rol in het ontstaan van het spinozisme?'.

Reader) started with the warning that what followed was solely meant for readers who 'have no clerical interests' nor any interest in 'vain and pedantic pseudo-learning'. He proposed not to allow any ministers at all in the colony that would be established. Ministers would not serve the peace and unity within this 'Society'; it was much more in need of good schools and capable doctors.³⁷

According to Van den Enden, too, 'equality' served as 'a major foundation' of the colony, but just as Plockhoy did not doubt the right to private ownership, Van den Enden did not deem it desirable to take away 'every distinction between persons'. It is clear that people are different and as long as the general interest does not suffer, 'everone's individual and natural equal freedom' must be respected as well.³⁸ According to Van den Enden people are therefore by nature equal but not the same, and they are moreover free:

And this alone is what we wish people to understand by our principal foundation of equality, namely, that in order to establish an orderly society, republic or commonwealth of Christian citizens, such an even balance (between more and less sensible people, more and less wealthy ones, male and female, the ruler and the ruled, etc.) must be found, through reason and experience, in all matters (...)³⁹

In brief, the colony in America should become a *republic*, and more in particular, a 'popular government' or a 'free state of equals',⁴⁰ a community governed by and for the people. In the Preface Van den Enden had already expressed his appreciation for the *Consideratien van Staet* (Political Considerations, 1660) by the De la Court brothers, one of the key texts of Dutch republicanism.⁴¹ That is: for the first edition of that work, for that original version still outlined the ideal of a democratic republic. In the second edition, which was published after Johan de la Court's death, his brother Pieter expressed his preference for an aristocratic government. Van den Enden would have none of this.⁴² Anyone wishing to be part

³⁷ (Van den Enden), *Kort Verhael*, 28–29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29–30. See also 69: 'The worst thing in a state is that no decent liberty is allowed...'

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 69. See on 'democratic republicanism': Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, Chapter 10.

⁴¹ V.H. [Johan and Pieter de la Court], *Consideratien en exemplelen van Staet*.

⁴² See Kossmann, *Political Thought in the Dutch Republic*, 60–74; Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice*, Chapter 4 and 'The Languages of Seventeenth-Century Republicanism' in the United Provinces'; Velema, "That a Republic is Better than a Monarchy"; Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, Chapter 2; Nyden-Bullock, *Spinoza's Radical Cartesian Mind*, Chapters 2 and 3.

of Van den Enden's republic would have to take a solemn oath never to aspire to dominance.⁴³

Van den Enden's opposition to slavery and the warm words he bestowed on the original inhabitants of the New Netherlands, the so-called 'naturals', were absolutely revolutionary. More than one century before Rousseau, Van den Enden defined the contours of the 'noble savage'. Slavery is truly un-Christian 'in so far as the Christian religion is a reasonable religion'.⁴⁴ And the Dutch could use the minor social differences between Indians as a model: they do acknowledge a sort of nobility but do not care much about this. Adultery is not punished and even the mutual wars remain civilized—they let women and children be in peace—and as far as there is any sort of government, it seems to 'be free and quite democratic': tribal chiefs reach the most important decisions in mutual agreement.⁴⁵

After Plockhoy's project in the New World failed, Van den Enden did not leave it at that. Van den Enden's biography still shows, just like Plockhoy's, major gaps. We know that he possessed a Latin school in the fifties of the seventeenth century and that Spinoza was one of his pupils, probably from 1657 until 1659. We also know that he played an important part in Spinoza's circle in the beginning of the sixties, when he got involved in Plockhoy's plans. Rumour had it that he was an 'atheist'.⁴⁶ Fact is that he moved to Paris in 1670 and would be hanged in 1674 due to his involvement in a conspiracy against Louis XIV. Before he left for France, he deemed it his duty to provide his native country with good advice. Again, he published a work anonymously, but the title page left little to be guessed about the author's intentions. The fact is that these *Stellingen* were said to be *Gedaen na der ware Christenens Even gelijke vryheids gronden* (drawn up according to the true Christians' equal claims to freedom) and to have been written by *Een liefhebber van alle der welbevoeghde Borgeren Even gelyke Vryheit* (a lover of the equal freedom of all competent citizens).⁴⁷

Van den Enden argued that all people, both men and women, are born free and that they are not obliged to do anything else than advance their own well-being.⁴⁸ Societies are shaped on the basis of the insight that

⁴³ (Van den Enden), *Kort Verhael*, 50.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21. For a detailed commentary, see Mertens, *Franciscus van den Enden's Brief Account*, I, Chapters 5 and 6.

⁴⁶ See Wim Klever's introduction to Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, 27–28.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

harmonious co-operation benefits that state of well-being more than anything else. Differences in talent will as a matter of course give rise to differences in well-being. As long as they do not endanger the individual members of the community, they are harmless. But to express social differences by means of academic titles, for example, is harmful. The original equality of all citizens must consistently be held in esteem.⁴⁹ Based on this realization only can the commonwealth remain what it must be: a gathering of free and equal people to the advantage of each individual member.⁵⁰ The form of government which is most suitable to keep that commonwealth intact is democracy.⁵¹ This goes, in principle, for all people, because all people are rational beings endowed with a natural sense of community.⁵²

Moreover, the two dangers that threaten a free commonwealth, ambition and superstition, can best be met by a popular assembly, for the people know what is in their interest and what is not. It is, however, important to keep the people well-informed, and, in particular, not to make the mistake of regarding religion as 'a first foundation of the republic or commonwealth'.⁵³ The 'atheist' that Van den Enden was supposed to be clearly had a keen eye for the abuse made of religion throughout the ages. Cunning and guile effected that superstition, in particular, was fostered and Christian churches arrogated to themselves power that was not rightly theirs. Collegiant echoes can be heard when Van den Enden argues that the visible church has nothing to do anymore with true faith:

The Christian faith, being altogether reasonable, does not consist in adherence to any external church ritual, nor absolutely in the incomprehensible, mere groundless assent to any authoritative tenet, whether of great or small authority; but it uniquely consists in a clear and distinct conviction of reason whereby something is accepted that doubtlessly enhances our knowledge and love of God and of our fellow men: for the whole sum of the Law and the Prophets is to love God above everything and one's neighbour like oneself.⁵⁴

With the political turn given to the Collegiant emphasis on the equality of believers in Plockhoy's and Van den Enden's work we find ourselves in the heart of the so-called radical Enlightenment.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 152 ff.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 174–175.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 194–195.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

Van den Enden's responsibility for the *Kort Verhael* and the *Vrye Politieke Stellingen* long remained a secret. In view of the stinging criticism of the regents that Van den Enden had expressed in the Afterword of his *Kort Verhael*, that was just as well. The Koerbagh brothers would become much more famous, if not infamous. They were born in Amsterdam and frequently seen at the Amsterdam colleges, and just like Balling and Van den Enden they were supposed to have become members of Spinoza's circle at an early stage. They were also closely watched by the Amsterdam church council, even if only because Johannes had studied theology and was a *proponent*, that is, was eligible for a position as minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. Johannes was an ardent Collegiant and it was, probably rightly so, suspected that he was propagating resolutely 'Socinian' ideas.⁵⁵ There is no knowledge of any writings by this Johannes, but Adriaan would grow into a prolific author, who wanted to achieve nothing less than the true enlightenment of the people.⁵⁶ Just as Van den Enden had argued, the first priority, according to Koerbagh, was to abolish Latin as the *lingua franca* of scholars and more in particular of lawyers and theologians.⁵⁷ With this in mind he first published a legal manual in 1664 and the infamous *Bloemhof* (Flower Garden) four years after that.⁵⁸ Adriaan, as is well-known, would meet a dreadful end; when he wanted to publish his *Ligt*, still in 1668, he was arrested, convicted by the Amsterdam magistrate and put in jail. Some months later he would die there. Although Adriaan was mainly interested in metaphysics and in the critique of religion, he left little doubt about his political sympathies, in *Bloemhof* especially. Read his explanation of the word 'Ignoble':

A distinction is made among men, some being called noble, others ignoble. But I need to explain briefly who in my opinion is noble or ignoble. Ignoble is he who is without learning and understanding, even if he were born of the greatest king; noble is he who is wise and learned, even if he were born of the poorest beggar.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ See my introduction to Koerbagh, *A Light Shining in Dark Places*.

⁵⁶ Wielema, 'The Two Faces of Adriaan Koerbagh' and 'Adriaan Koerbagh: Biblical Criticism and Enlightenment'. See also Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, 273–287; Vandebossche, 'Adriaan Koerbagh en Spinoza'; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 190–192; Den Boer, 'Le Dictionnaire libertin d'Adriaen Koerbagh'.

⁵⁷ Van den Enden, *Vrye Politieke Stellingen*, 155.

⁵⁸ Koerbagh, 't Nieuw Woordenboek der Regten; Koerbagh, *Een Bloemhof*.

⁵⁹ Koerbagh, *Een Bloemhof*, 346.

Also read his entry ‘Democracy’: ‘a government by the people’, in which every true citizen can speak up. Unfortunately, as Koerbagh had to acknowledge, the people’s impact on the governing of the Dutch Republic had increasingly diminished.⁶⁰ In this way, the democratic wing of Dutch republicanism became gradually more critical about the oligarchic rule of the regents, which in the second half of the seventeenth century began to look more and more like an aristocracy.

3. Conclusion

It would go too far to treat the preference for democracy as a form of government here in the way Spinoza would subsequently describe it in his *TPP* (1670) and his *TP* (1677). Spinoza’s political ideas also owe much to authors such as Machiavelli, Hobbes and the brothers De la Court. Let us not forget that what Hobbes had written in *Leviathan* (1651), about the great similarities between people, is generally seen as the most important source—through Locke—of Jefferson’s creed ‘that all men are created equal’.⁶¹ Even earlier, Descartes’ conviction that people have, in principle, the same rationality, had definitely had an emancipatory effect.⁶²

Nevertheless, Spinoza’s political theory may of course also be seen as the pinnacle of the egalitarian tendencies as they arose in the 1650s and 1660s in the Collegiant circles which aided him after his expulsion, in 1656, from the Portuguese synagogue. It is a fact that Hobbes was certainly no democrat. When Plockhoy and Van den Enden added a political dimension to the Collegiant notion of equality in the early sixties of the seventeenth century, Spinoza was working on the first parts of the *E*: he thought about God and the human mind. Nothing suggests a great political interest

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 183: ‘Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind: as that, though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another: yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe. And as to the faculties of the mind, (setting aside the arts grounded upon words, and especially that skill of proceeding upon general and infallible rules, called Science; which very few have, and but in few things; as being not a native faculty, born with us; nor attained, as prudence, while we look after somewhat els), I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength.’ Cf. Zagorin, *Hobbes and the Law of Nature*, Chapter 2.

⁶² Stuurman, *François Poulin de Barre*, Chapter 3.

at that time in Spinoza's life. His earliest texts, the *TIE* and the *KV*, do not indicate this either. Only from the middle of the 1660s, when he starts writing the *TPP*, does he deal with political problems.

A hundred years before Rousseau, Spinoza arrived in the *TPP* at the revolutionary conclusion that democracy results in the best form of government. Siep Stuurman has rightly pointed out that, nevertheless, Spinoza and Van den Enden exclude women from all political decision-making.⁶³ But whether that means that Spinoza became unfaithful to the idea that all people are by nature equal, is questionable. It is a fact that Spinoza does not regard democracy as the 'ideal' form of government from any normative perspective. According to Spinoza, a government for and by the people is, as a fact, the most natural form of government. The following passage from the sixteenth chapter of the *TPP* has become a classic example:

For in a democratic state nobody transfers his natural right to another so completely that thereafter he is not to be consulted; he transfers it to the majority of the entire community of which he is part. In this way all men remain equal, as they were before in a state of nature.⁶⁴

Democracy, from Spinoza's point of view, is a regime that is closest to human nature and that offers the best safeguards to protect the interests of as many inhabitants as possible. According to Spinoza, this makes democracy in principle also first and foremost a rational and stable form of government—a beautiful illustration of how an originally theological idea could get a completely new meaning. And please note that this happened in the context of the Radical Enlightenment.

Spinoza's preference for democracy therefore is not so much based on an ideal, but on a fact, which he found confirmed empirically in the history of human communities. It also is a fact that women in the seventeenth century could hardly act on their own authority, if only because they were economically dependent on men—be it that women could operate relatively independently precisely in the Republic.⁶⁵ Whether Spinoza's political philosophy is truly 'modern' is questionable.⁶⁶ But nothing in Spinoza's philosophy justifies that women *must* be dependent on men.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 296. See also Matheron, 'Femmes et serviteurs dans la démocratie spinoziste'; Kerkhoven, 'Spinoza's clausules'; Van Reijen, *Spinoza*, 207–220.

⁶⁴ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 243.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship*.

⁶⁶ Van Bunge, 'The Modernity of Radical Enlightenment'.

On the contrary, his ultimately Cartesian recognition of the existence of a single ‘human nature’—which is then taken in an anti-Cartesian sense, because people according to Spinoza are not autonomous substances but modifications of a single substance, which all naturally strive to maintain their existence—offers the opportunity to accommodate the ambitions of *all* people.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Cf. Steinberg, ‘Spinoza’s Ethical Doctrine and the Unity of Human Nature’.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IDEA OF RELIGIOUS IMPOSTURE

In the early modern age the idea of religious imposture made its first, spectacular appearance in the political writings of Machiavelli and the so-called *raison d'état* analysis of political power, which stretched up to Lipsius and beyond. It was then taken up by the French *libertinage érudit*, where its theological connotations were emphasized, after which it reappeared in some of the clandestine manuscripts of the early radical Enlightenment, most notoriously, of course, in the *Traité des trois imposteurs*. In this chapter, I shall try to sketch some of the ways in which the idea of religious imposture was passed down from the early sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, concentrating on the particular place Spinoza occupied in this essentially sceptical tradition, which led to the Enlightenment. In this way, I hope to address the wider issue of Spinoza's role in 'the making of modernity'. For while the part Spinoza played in the early diffusion of Enlightenment radicalism has recently undergone a fundamental re-assessment, his treatment of the idea of religious imposture differs sharply from the views expressed in many of the texts produced during the early, radical Enlightenment, even though the authors of these texts often posed as 'Spinozists' themselves.¹

1. *Machiavelli to the Symbolum sapientiae*

First, however, some of the *religious* sources dealing with the dangers of imposture need to be recognized. To begin with, both the Old and New Testaments go to great lengths to emphasize the necessity of distinguishing true from false prophets (e.g. Deuteronomy 13:2–6; Jesaiah 9:14; Jeremiah 23; 29:8, 26; Matthew 7:15 etc.; Mark 13:22), miracles (e.g. Deuteronomy 5:3–4, 19;

¹ This chapter could not possibly have been written without the previous efforts of a host of foreign scholars whose massive erudition I have plundered shamelessly. Several titles should be singled out: Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*; Spink, *French Free-Thought*; Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 87–109; Gregory, *Etica e religione nella critica libertina*; Zagorin, *Ways of Lying*, Chapter 12; Schwarzbach and Fairbairn, 'History and Structure of our *Traité des trois imposteurs*'; Berti, 'Unmasking the Truth' and, most recently and most importantly: Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus* and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

Exodus 20:18; John 21–25), and even, for that matter, Gods. If the hunt for impostors was started anywhere, it was in Scripture itself and would for obvious reasons be continued by the first commentators of the great monotheist ‘counter-religions’.² Possibly inspired by Averroist commentaries on Aristotle and perhaps echoing the tradition which associated Frederick II, *stupor mundi*, with the three impostor-thesis—which seems to have been rooted in Maimonides and in even earlier Persian sources—³ Machiavelli, in his famous commentary on Livy, launched the idea that Rome owed its first rise to the invention of an official cult, which turned the affairs of state into a matter of religious orthodoxy. To all intents and purposes, Machiavelli took his more immediate point of departure from the Greek historian Polybius. In his *Historiae* a crucial passage occurs, that would be referred to again and again throughout the early modern age:

But the quality in which the Roman commonwealth is most distinctly superior is in my opinion the nature of their religious convictions. I believe that it is the very thing which among other peoples is an object of reproach, I mean superstition, which maintains the cohesion of the Roman State. These matters are clothed in such pomp and introduced to such an extent into their public and private life that nothing would exceed it, a fact that will surprise many. My own opinion at least is that they have adopted this course for the sake of the common people. It is a course which perhaps would not have been necessary had it been possible to form a state composed of wise men, but as every multitude is fickle, full of lawless desires, unreasoned passion, and violent anger, the multitude must be held in by invisible terrors and suchlike pageantry. For this reason I think, not that the ancients acted rashly and at haphazard in introducing among the people notions concerning the gods and beliefs in the terrors of hell, but that the moderns are most rash and foolish in banishing such beliefs.⁴

Commenting on Romulus’ successor, Numa Pompilius, Machiavelli in his *Discorsi* echoed Polybius in the following fashion:

As he found a very ferocious people and wished to reduce it to civil obedience with the arts of peace, he turned to religion as a thing altogether necessary if he wished to maintain a civilization and he constituted it so that for many centuries there was never so much fear of God as in that republic,

² On the notion of a ‘counter-religion’, see Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, Chapter 1.

³ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 15–33; Niewöhner, *Veritas sive varietas*.

⁴ Polybius, *Histories*, III, 395 (VI, 56, 6–12). On the question of how Machiavelli, who did not read Greek, could have studied Polybius’ sixth book, which at the time he composed the *Discorsi* was not yet available in any translation, see Hexter, ‘Seyssel, Machiavelli, and Polybius VI’.

which made easier whatever enterprise the Senate or the great men of Rome might plan to make.⁵

Thus, the Florentine councillor established a tradition that was to resurge in what is probably the first coherently argued atheistic treatise written in early modern Europe, the anonymous *Theophrastus redivivus*, which dates from 1659.⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that the atheistic author of this text borrowed Polybius' insight from Lipsius' *Monita et exempla politica* (I, 3), without, however, acknowledging that Polybius was no atheist at all. Neither, for that matter, was Kritias, the Greek sophist who according to Cicero remarked that religion was an essentially political invention.⁷

Be that as it may, the general thrift of the *Theophrastus* is quite unambiguous. The second chapter of the third treatise, 'On Religion', simply states that it demonstrates 'religionem omnino esse artem politicam'.⁸ In a special section devoted to the 'Mosaic Religion', it is also noted that Moses was educated in Egypt 'et omnibus Aegyptiorum disciplinis instrutus fuerit'.⁹ There can be little doubt as to which particular discipline Moses had excelled in, since it is clear 'Mosem magicas artes calluisse et in Aegyptio perceperisse'.¹⁰ It is equally clear to which purpose Moses put his expertise—'enim artis politicae et regnandi scientiae erat peritissimus'.¹¹ Apart from Lipsius, another seventeenth-century author whose Machiavellian analysis of religion was often quoted in later decades, was the

⁵ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 34. (*Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Titio Livio*, I, 11). Cf. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I, 19. See Whitfield, 'Machiavelli's Use of Livy'. On Machiavelli's connection to the ensuing reason of state-tradition in Italian political thought, see Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State*, esp. Chapters 3 and 6 and *Machiavelli*. See also Bock, Skinner, and Viroli (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism*.

⁶ *Theophrastus redivivus*, II, 553: 'Ideoque Polybius Romanos laudat et prudenter eos fecisse autumnat, quod partem eam quae religionem et deos spectat in republica sua sic conformarint et paene tragice extulerint, ut nihil sit addere, inquit Lipsius...' See also II, 357–358: 'Machiavellus (...) eandem tuetur opinionem et asserit nullum umquam novarum magnarumque legem latorem extitisse, qui ad deum tamquam ad authorem illas non retulerit, quia absque hoc commento numquam acceptere essent a populis...'

⁷ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, I, 118. See Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus*, 213 ff.

⁸ *Theophrastus redivivus*, II, 349. Tullio Gregory has emphasized the crucial role played in this chapter by Tomasso Campanella's highly ambiguous *Atheismus triumphatus*: Gregory, *Theophrastus redivivus*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 433. This is of course simply a phrase taken from *Acts* 7:22: 'Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.'

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 436.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 437, and see the accompanying note 16.

libertin par excellence Gabriel Naudé.¹² Whereas Machiavelli, throughout the *Discorsi* and in *Il Principe* praises Moses—albeit it mainly for his ruthlessness—,¹³ in Naudé’s work, the devastating effects of the idea of religious imposture became clear, once it was directed towards the Jewish religion and associated with the long-standing tradition regarding Moses’ Egyptian background. The suggestion that Moses had simply stolen his religion from the Egyptians had been clear ever since Origenes’ *Contra Celsum* and was fostered by the Hermetic tradition, but during the early seventeenth century, Celsus’ suspicions re-surfaced with a vengeance. According to some, Naudé mused, ‘Moyse (...) avoit été instruit en toute la sagesse des Egyptiens, s'est servi de cette Magie, qui lui estoit plus familier et cogneue qu'à pas un autre, pour faire ses miracles.’ And Jesus, Naudé added, is supposed to have practised the same magic.¹⁴ Of course, Naudé would have nothing of these accusations. Although Naudé’s principal concern was to destroy the Hermetic *prisca theologia*, it was his secularizing naturalism and his suggestion that the founding fathers of this ‘magical’ tradition were essentially skilled politicians, that continued to attract attention long after Hermeticism had grown out of fashion.

By the early eighteenth century, one could quote many other texts which argued along this line, including Vanini’s *Amphitheatrum*—which actually went so far as calling Machiavelli ‘atheorum princeps—,’¹⁵ Campanella’s

¹² Naudé, *Apologie*, 46–57 and *Considérations politiques*, 45–50, 84–93, 119–125, 158, 159–179, etc. See Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, 469–472; Adam, *Les libertins au XVII^e siècle*, 140–158; Bianchi, *Tradizione libertina e critica storica*, 17–37; Charles-Daubert, *Les libertins érudits*, 81–96. On Naudé’s Machiavellianism, see also Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson*, 246–256 and more recently Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State*, Chapter 5. Donaldson claims that Naudé’s comments on Machiavelli’s analysis of Livy’s account of Numa Pompilius actually derive from another source: Pasquier, *Catechisme des Jesuites*. Naudé, who got to know Campanella personally, was not the first Machiavellian *libertin*, as was shown by Battista, *Alle origine del pensiero politico libertino*. See Charron, *Les trois veritez* and Montaigne, *Essais*, II, 198–210 (*De la gloire*), where it is stressed, however, that Moses had the *right God* on his side.

¹³ See in particular *Discorsi*, I, 9 and 11; II, 8 and III, 30. Cf. Brown, ‘Savonarola, Machiavelli and Moses’.

¹⁴ Naudé, *Apologie*, 38. See more in general Smith, *Jesus the Magician* and Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*.

¹⁵ Vanini, *Amphitheatrum aeternae providentiae divino-magicalm*, 178, commenting on Machiavelli’s alleged denial of divine providence: ‘Nicolaus Machiavellus Atheorum facile princeps, in *Commentariis ad Titum Livium* et in perniciosissimo libello *De Principe* vernaculo idiomate conscriptis, existimavit haec omnia falsa esse, et a Principibus ad incaute plebeculae instructionem conficta ut, quam ratio non posset ad officium, religio saltem duceret’. See also his *De admirandis Naturae*, 459–466, in which Christ is revealed as an impostor who cleverly conjured up the story of the Anti-Christ.

Atheismus triumphatus,¹⁶ the *Quatrains du déiste*,¹⁷ Cherbury's *Religio laïci*,¹⁸ and Hobbes' *Leviathan*, according to which:

The first Founders, and Legislators of Common-wealths amongst the Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience, and peace, have in all places taken care: First, to imprint in their minds a belief, that those precepts which they gave concerning Religion, might not be thought to proceed from their own device, but from the dictates of some God, or other Spirit; or else that they themselves were of a higher nature than mere mortalls, that their Lawes might the more easily be received: So *Numa Pompilius* pretended to receive the Ceremonies he instituted amongst the Romans, from the Nymph *Egeria*...¹⁹

One of the most interesting examples of an early clandestine manuscript in which this tradition is reflected is the *Symbolum sapientiae*. In this text, composed in Germany, arguably as early as 1678, it is contended first that 'religio et superstitione sunt unum idemque',²⁰ after which Moses is portrayed as a sly magician who managed to make his people believe that his legislation was of divine origin—just as *all* legislators always had done.²¹ Next, Moses is actually called an 'impostor'.²² Broadly following the Machiavelli-Naudé tradition in Moses-'scholarship', the author contends that what Moses could not achieve 'per fraudes', he sought to realize by force ('per vim'), and therefore subsequently established a theocracy.²³

The *Symbolum sapientiae* is such a remarkable manuscript for at least two, very different reasons. Firstly, it is interesting because it belongs to the Pyrrhonist tradition. According to Winfried Schröder's recent and authoritative *Ursprünge des Atheismus*, it is precisely the agnostic atheism extolled by the *Symbolum sapientiae*, and, by others such as Nicolas Fréret's *Lettre de Thrasybule à Leucippe*, that turned early modern atheism into a philosophically respectable tradition.²⁴ Secondly, this particular text leads us to the key role Spinoza played in the radical Enlightenment. As will be only too well-known, Spinoza devoted a considerable part of his

¹⁶ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 75–91.

¹⁷ Adam, *Les libertins érudits*, 80–109, 98–99.

¹⁸ Cherbury, *De Religione Laici*. See also Lagrée, *Le Salut du laïc* and Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, 140 ff.

¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 177 (I, 12). See Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 190–195.

²⁰ *Cymbalum mundi sive Symbolum sapientiae*, 108.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 120–121.

²² *Ibid.*, 122.

²³ *Ibid.*, 122–124.

²⁴ Fréret, *Lettre de Thrasybule à Leucippe*. See Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus*, 369–388.

TTP to a careful analysis of biblical prophecy and miracles in general, and to Moses in particular. In fact, the *Symbolum sapientiae* delivers a perfect illustration of what could be achieved on the basis of the *TTP*, from which it borrows heavily, once one no longer felt obliged to suppose, as Spinoza had done, that Moses had been acting *in good faith*. According to Spinoza, Moses himself was in no doubt that God *was* implementing divine measures for which he, Moses, himself was merely a tool.

2. *Spinoza on Moses and Christ*

Most of the literature on Spinoza's view on Moses only deals with Chapter 8 of the *TTP*, 'In which it is shown that the Pentateuch and the Books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel and Kings were not written by themselves.'²⁵ As far as the Pentateuch is concerned, Spinoza notes that to his knowledge Ibn Ezra in his commentary on Deuteronomy was the first to point out that Moses could not possibly have been the author of the Pentateuch, since it recounts events that took place after his death. Spinoza completely agrees with this, and adds many instances of post-Mosaic historiography in the Pentateuch. Moses' responsibility for the Pentateuch is, however, only one detail of his general perception of Moses, the main points of which can be brought out by concentrating on Spinoza's comments on Moses as a 'teacher or prophet' and as a 'lawgiver or ruler'.²⁶

Spinoza acknowledges the pre-eminence of Moses among the prophets of the Old Testament, by emphasizing that he was the only one to whom God 'with a real voice revealed (...) the laws which he willed to be enjoined by the Hebrews' (Exodus 25:22; Deuteronomy 5:4; Numbers 12:6–7).²⁷ He goes on to maintain that this was an exceptional event, since revelations usually occur by means of *signs*. Elsewhere he simply calls Moses 'the greatest of the prophets'.²⁸ We also have to take heed of the fact that he is not concerned with what actually happened on Mount Sinai, but merely with what Scripture tells us about Moses' encounter with God. For interpreting Scripture, according to Spinoza, is an attempt not to reconstruct the truth about the actual history of a number of real *events*,

²⁵ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 161. See, however, also Zac, 'Spinoza et l'état des Hébreux'; Popkin, *The Third Force*, Chapter 8 and Terpstra, 'De betekenis van de oudtestamentische theocratie'.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

but to understand the moral meaning of the biblical *text* relating these events. This textual enquiry is only possible if Scripture is compared with itself.²⁹ The example Spinoza uses to illustrate this, concerns the compatibility of Moses' sayings 'God is fire' and 'God is jealous':

the question as to whether Moses did or did not believe that God is fire must in no wise be decided by the rationality or irrationality of the belief, but solely from other pronouncements of Moses. In this particular case, since there are several other instances where Moses clearly tells us that God has no resemblance to visible things in heaven or on the earth or in the water, we must hence conclude that either this statement or all those others must be explained metaphorically.³⁰

Again, Moses' warning in Deuteronomy 31:27 that the Hebrews will surely rebel against the Lord after he has passed away 'must not be taken as meaning that he intends to prove by rational argument that the Israelites will necessarily turn away from the true worship of God after his death': 'these words of Moses are merely a moral exhortation where, in a rhetorical expression, he predicts the future backsliding of the people as his lively imagination enabled him to picture it.'³¹

This is not regarded as diminishing Moses' biblical pre-eminence, although being a prophet, Moses was only able to provide *moral* certainty. This, Spinoza infers from his own words in Deuteronomy 13, where it is said that the Lord also tries his people by false revelations, so that prophetic revelation is by its very nature open to doubt and at best highly probable.³² What is more, Moses' prophecies, like those of any other prophet, were adopted to his beliefs, since the contents of any revelation by necessity are determined by the nature of the imagination receiving it.³³ Moses being no exception, it was revealed to him, for instance, that Israel would be taken care of by angels (Exodus 33:2–3).³⁴ Moses' affirmation (Deuteronomy 10:15) that God had chosen the Israelites for himself above all other nations, should also be understood as an example of God accommodating Himself to the understanding of the Hebrews.³⁵ Spinoza does not deny that in a sense Moses' Israel was indeed an elect people.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 143–144. Cf. 230–231.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

³² *Ibid.*, 74. Cf. 130, 139, 233–234.

³³ *Ibid.*, 81–84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 83–84.

On the contrary, he makes much of the fact that according to Scripture the Hebrews were indeed ‘chosen by God above all the others’,³⁶ although this should of course be interpreted naturally—the power of God being nothing but the power of nature: Israel was chosen ‘by reason of its social organisation and the good fortune whereby it achieved supremacy and retained it for so many years’.³⁷ Again, Spinoza claims to infer this from Scripture itself.

Thus, Spinoza moves on to a treatment of Moses as legislator and politician. Significantly, he compares Moses to Christ: ‘since Christ was sent to teach not only the Jews but the entire human race’ he had to have a mind ‘adapted to the beliefs and doctrines held in common by all mankind, that is, to those axioms that are universally true’.³⁸ Accordingly, Spinoza continues, ‘this fact that God revealed himself through Christ, or to Christ’s mind, directly, and not through words and images as in the case of the prophets, can have only this meaning, that Christ perceived truly, or understood, what was revealed’.³⁹ Moses on the other hand, was exclusively the saviour of Israel. His revelations *were* adapted to his own understanding, his Law ‘was not of universal application but specially adapted to the character and preservation of one particular people’.⁴⁰ In a sense, Moses’ legislation must be said to have resulted from a—very fortunate—misunderstanding on his part:

as a result of revelation or basic principles revealed to him, he perceived a way by which the people of Israel could well be united in a particular territory to form a political union or state, and also a way by which that people could well be constrained to obedience. But he did not perceive, nor was it revealed to him, that this way was the best of all ways, nor that the end for which they were striving would be a consequence necessarily entailed by the general obedience of the people in such a territory. Therefore he perceived these things not as eternal truths, but as instructions and precepts, and he ordained them as laws of God. Hence it came he imagined God as a ruler, lawgiver, king, merciful, just, and so forth; whereas these are all merely attributes of human nature, and not at all applicable to the divine nature.⁴¹

This is why the ceremonial observances laid down by Moses no longer hold. They pertained to the Hebrew commonwealth alone and bore no

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 107–108.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 104. Cf. 113–114.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

moral sanction. Their lack of universality is evident from the fact that they were enforced by means of material penalties, whereas the Law of Christ is universal and promises only spiritual rewards.⁴²

This is not to say that according to Spinoza a universal morality based on a clear understanding of eternal truths would suffice, and that Christ 'abrogated'⁴³ the law of Moses: 'no society can subsist without government and coercion, and consequently without laws to control and restrain men's lusts and unbridled urges.'⁴⁴ Without Moses, Israel would surely have perished. The poor state of Israel, however, after so many years of captivity, did force Moses to take three extraordinary measures in order to secure the survival of the Hebrews. First he introduced a state religion in order to replace fear as his people's strongest source of inspiration by devotion. Next, 'he bound them by consideration of gifts received, while promising many more benefits from God in the future.' Thus he turned the Hebrews into a grateful and hopeful people. Finally, he made sure that even the most intimate details of the private lives of his people were constantly associated with ceremonial observances to the effect that each and every member of his nation 'should be utterly subservient to its ruler':⁴⁵ 'their life was one long schooling in obedience'.⁴⁶ They were never to forget who had saved them from slavery and he succeeded by creating a *covenant*, specifically designed to promote obedience.⁴⁷

Next, Spinoza stresses that Israel, after its flight from Egypt, was free to establish new laws of its own, but decided to transfer all its natural rights to God alone, whom they held responsible for their liberation. And since the Hebrews recognized that Moses was a genuine prophet, their obedience to his prophetic revelations was unconditional. It was, however, God who held sovereignty over Israel. Israel was not called the kingdom of Moses but of God, and all its enemies were enemies of God. As far as the internal constitution of this state was concerned, there was no difference

⁴² *Ibid.*, 113–114. Cf. 272: 'God, however, has revealed through his Apostles that his covenant is no longer written in ink or engraved on tablets of stone, but is inscribed by God's spirit in men's hearts.'

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 116–117.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 221: 'Moses' aim was not to convince the Israelites by reasoned argument, but to bind them by a covenant, by oaths, and by benefits received; he induced the people to obey the Law under threat of punishment, while exhorting them thereto by promise of rewards.'

between civil law and religion, so that Israel was in fact a theocracy.⁴⁸ However, the first covenant, according to which all Israelites were equal since they had all equally transferred their rights to God alone, took on a completely new dimension once they decided that they did not *want* to hear God speaking to them. As is shown in Exodus 19:16 and 20:18-20, they became so frightened of ‘God speaking in the midst of fire’, that they asked Moses to speak to them on God’s behalf:

Therefore Moses was left as the sole lawgiver and interpreter of God’s laws, and thus also the supreme judge, whom no one could judge, and who alone acted on God’s behalf among the Hebrews, that is, held the supreme kingship, since he alone had the right to consult God, to give God’s answers to the people, and to compel them to obey.⁴⁹

This created the opportunity for Moses to establish a *monarchy*, but from the fact that Moses ordered his successors as prophets—his brother Aaron and the Levites—to have hardly any civil rights, and made them dependent for their livelihood on the other tribes, we must infer that he actually avoided the institution of hereditary kingship. In fact, ‘Moses did not choose anyone to succeed to his rule: he divided all its functions in such a way that those who followed him were regarded as his deputies, carrying on the government as if the king were absent, not dead.’⁵⁰ Jewish priests were not to control the army. Moses therefore made sure that he was succeeded by ministers, by *servants* of the state, that is.⁵¹

From the history of the commonwealth of the Hebrews, Spinoza deduces several political principles, which ‘may perhaps be quite profitable to imitate.’ First, Moses’ example goes to show that ‘it is not inconsistent with God’s kingship to elect a supreme ruler who would have complete command over the state’.⁵² But the fact that the gradual emergence of a monarchy among the Hebrews after Moses’ instructions had fallen into neglect, reveals that popular sovereignty was far more beneficial to the peace within the commonwealth than investing sovereignty in hereditary kings. It is at this point that Spinoza, at last, feels free to address the mounting political crisis in the Dutch Republic as a result of the decline of De Witt’s rule, which ended the age of ‘True Freedom’: by the late 1660s the cries from the Voetians to re-install William III as stadholder, and to

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 254–255.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 256. Cf. 282.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 257–258.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 272.

curb the politics of—relative—toleration were becoming ever louder.⁵³ According to Spinoza, the Republic should do no such thing since the history of Moses and his successors proved:

1. How disastrous it is for both religion and state to grant to religious functionaries any right to issue decrees or to concern themselves with state business. (...)
2. How dangerous it is to refer to religious jurisdiction matters that are purely philosophical, and to legislate concerning beliefs that are frequently subject to dispute, or can so be. (...)
3. How essential it is for both commonwealth and religion that the sovereign power should be given the right to decide what is right and what is wrong. (...)
4. Finally, we see how fatal it is for a people unaccustomed to the rule of kings, and already possessing established laws, to set up a monarchy...⁵⁴

To be sure, nowhere in the *TTP* is there the slightest hint that Spinoza questioned Moses' sincerity. Neither is there any reference to Moses' 'magical' skills. This, it should be noted, not only in sharp contrast to the tradition of the *libertinage*, but also to the views of one of his most loyal disciples, namely Adriaan Koerbagh.

That radical Cartesians within Spinoza's 'circle' had started questioning the very foundations of revealed religion had become apparent in Lode-wijk Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, published in 1666.⁵⁵ Two years after the publication of the *Interpres*, however, another of Spinoza's Amsterdam friends issued an even more disturbing book, a dictionary entitled *Bloemhof* (Flower Bed), in which several Old and New Testament personages were presented in a highly unusual fashion, to say the least. More importantly, however, Koerbagh under the entry 'Bible' commented bluntly that no one knew who had written the 'Jewish books', and under *Exodus* claimed that it had been composed by Ezra⁵⁶—an obvious challenge to the long held belief that the Pentateuch had been written by Moses himself.

Within weeks of the publication of Koerbagh's dictionary, its author had to flee to the free town of Culemborg to escape the charge of blasphemy. While the judicial authorities of Amsterdam were still looking

⁵³ Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapters 4–5.

⁵⁴ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 276–277.

⁵⁵ For a recent analysis of this book and its widely varying interpretations, see Walther, 'Biblische Hermeutik und historische Erklärung'. On its reception, see Bordoli, *Ragione e Scritura*.

⁵⁶ Cf. his remarks on 'Deuteronomium' and 'Numeri'. See on Koerbagh: Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, 269 ff. and Wielema, 'Adriaan Koerbagh: Biblical Criticism and Enlightenment'.

for him, Koerbagh started publishing an even more daring text, entitled *Een Ligt schynende in Duystere Plaatsen* (A Light Shining in Dark Places). His Culemborg printer, however, alarmed the Utrecht police, after which Koerbagh fled again, this time heavily disguised, to Leiden, where he was finally caught. Back in Amsterdam he was convicted and put to jail, where he died a few months later (1669). Although *Een Ligt* was never issued, two manuscript copies have been preserved, which reveal a startling radicalism. Throughout *Een Ligt* Koerbagh refers to Moses in a rather ambiguous fashion. Arguing from a roughly Spinozan metaphysics, he declares that the only true religion is the one produced by reason,⁵⁷ the true 'Word of God'.⁵⁸ As far as Moses, 'an extremely excellent man',⁵⁹ followed reason in issuing his laws, these laws can indeed be called divine, as long as we agree that God, that is infinite nature itself,⁶⁰ did not physically hand over any decrees to Moses.⁶¹ On the other hand, Moses, according to Koerbagh, introduced many 'credulities',⁶² did not write the Pentateuch,⁶³ and was the first in a long line of religious impostors,⁶⁴ claiming that the divine spirit had exclusively revealed itself to him. Koerbagh repeatedly argued that Moses had learnt this trick from Egyptian magicians.⁶⁵ In the final analysis, however, Koerbagh is not really sure whether Moses' impostures are to be condemned. Unless the Hebrews had become 'too beastly', the power of reason is such that even Moses did not need deception.⁶⁶ Yet Moses' legislation should not primarily be understood as an instance of the all too common imposture of priests, Moses being first and foremost a 'statesman' who apparently, or so it would seem, should be allowed to lie.⁶⁷ Again, Spinoza wrote nothing of the sort.

Spinoza's treatment of Christ reveals even more awe in that he recognizes that, somehow, Christ must have been in possession of unique knowledge, which actually turned him into the greatest sage the world has ever

⁵⁷ Koerbagh, *Een Ligt*, 237.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 365–367.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 495–496.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 245–246.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 338–339.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 478–481.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 481, 669.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 508.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 503.

seen.⁶⁸ Of course, Spinoza denies the resurrection. In Letter 78, to Oldenburg, he is adamant:

The passion, death, and burial of Christ I accept literally, but his resurrection I understand in an allegorical sense. I do indeed admit that this is related by the Evangelists with such detail that we cannot deny that the Evangelists themselves believed that the body of Christ rose again and ascended to heaven to sit at God's right hand, and that this could also have been seen by unbelievers if they had been present at the places where Christ appeared to the disciples. Nevertheless without injury to the teaching of the Gospel, they could have been deceived, as was the case with other prophets (...) But Paul, to whom Christ also appeared later, rejoiced that he knows Christ not after the flesh, but after the spirit.⁶⁹

The classic distinction between 'carnal' and 'spiritual' knowledge had been evoked earlier by Spinoza, in Letter 73, to the same Oldenburg:

for salvation it is not altogether necessary to know Christ according to the flesh; but with regard to the eternal son of God, that is, God's eternal wisdom, which has manifested itself in all things and chiefly in the human mind, and most of all in Christ Jesus, a very different view must be taken. For without this no one can attain a state of blessedness, since this alone teaches what is true and false, good and evil. And since, as I have said, this wisdom has been manifested most of all through Jesus Christ, his disciples have preached it as far as he revealed it to them, and have shown themselves able to glory above all others in that spirit of Christ.⁷⁰

In the *TTP* the 'spirit' of Christ also figures prominently. Moreover, Spinoza attempts to explain why Christ, contrary to Moses, was not merely a prophet:

a man who can perceive by pure intuition that which is not contained in the basic principles of our cognition and cannot be deduced therefrom must needs possess a mind whose excellence far surpasses the human mind. Therefore I do not believe that anyone has attained such a degree of perfection surpassing all others, except Christ. To him God's ordinances leading men to salvation were revealed not by words or by vision, but directly, so that God manifested himself to the Apostles through the mind of Christ as he once did to Moses through an audible voice. The Voice of Christ can thus be called the Voice of God in the same way as that which Moses heard. In

⁶⁸ See Zac, *Spinoza et l'interprétation de l'Écriture*; Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*; Laux, *Imagination et religion* and most recently Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 208–223.

⁶⁹ Spinoza, *Letters*, 348 (Letter 78).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 333 (Letter 73).

that sense it can also be said that the wisdom of God—that is, wisdom that is more than human—took on human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way of salvation (...) Therefore if Moses spoke with God face to face as a man may with his fellow (through the medium of their bodies), then Christ communed with God mind to mind.⁷¹

Needless to say, these passages have always puzzled Spinoza's commentators once they compare them to his comments on God and Nature, his commitment to a full-blown determinism, and not least to the strictly philosophical way to salvation elaborated in the final part of his main work, the *E*. Ironically, from a very early age, Spinoza's professed loyalty to some of the basic tenets of Christianity, spurred his critics to portray him as an impostor himself.⁷² In their view, Spinoza should of course have contended that Moses and christ were impostors. The fact is, however, that he did nothing of the sort. On the contrary, in the *E* (IV, 68schol.), 'the spirit of Christ' is linked with 'the idea of God', leading to *philosophical* salvation. As a consequence, in his chapter on miracles, Spinoza limits himself to the explanation of the natural causes of the unusual events that accompanied Moses' and Jesus' acts, but he does not expand on the evil intentions of their supposed authors.

It has been argued that this 'incoherence' is part of a quasi-Marrano rhetoric, hiding the 'true' message of the *TPP* behind a purposely contradictory exterior.⁷³ But this interpretation seems far-fetched in view of Spinoza's scathing comments on prophecy and miracles *as such*, his willingness to question the received wisdom as regards the historical integrity of the Old Testament, and his barely concealed assault on Voetian calls for the restoration of the Stadholderate. What is more, unless we regard the *TPP* as merely a party-political pamphlet, I fail to see why Spinoza should have bothered to publish it in the first place. Surely, it must have been intended as a substantial addition to the views laid down in the *E*.

3. *The Symbolum sapientiae to Lessing*

To return to the *Symbolum sapientiae*, this clandestine manuscript is perfectly straightforward in its insistence on Moses' and Jesus' unreliability:

⁷¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 64–65.

⁷² Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 108–122.

⁷³ See most notably Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 142–201; Tosel, *Spinoza ou le crépuscule de la servitude*; Moreau, *Spinoza*, 348 ff. and Chapter 1 of this book.

'Cum vero Moses populum Israel sibi subiuagere intenderet, Deum quem-dam fingebat ...'⁷⁴ Next, it is claimed that Moses' miracles were, of course, all produced by 'art' or 'nature'.⁷⁵ Moving on to Christ, the author of the *Symbolum sapientiae* again starts from a firmly Spinozan premiss: 'Hic vir (...) perspicassimus erat et fundamentorum philosophiae non ignarus'.⁷⁶ However, this insight is put to use *against* the Christian religion: 'Ipsius scopum non fuisse tradere novam religionem voluntatemque divinam, sed sua precepta tantum fuisse mere philosophica'.⁷⁷ That Jesus called himself Son of God should be understood as an extreme example of rhetorical accommodation 'ad captum stultorum'.⁷⁸ As a matter of fact, it was only Paul who created Christianity, after he fell from his horse.⁷⁹

This way of ridiculing the origins of Christianity was expanded on endlessly by a host of radical deists, such as César Chesneau Du Marsais, who in his *Examen de la religion* would argue that if Jesus had been the Son of God, he would not have been dependent on the clumsy reports of a handful of disciples concerning his acts: 'Si Jésus-Christ est venu pour se faire connoître, pourquoi ne l'a-t-il pas fait ? Why did he not, for instance, write a book?⁸⁰ Even Fontenelle in his *Des miracles* wondered how it was possible that during his lifetime Jesus had remained such an obscure figure, suggesting that it was his disciples who started to conjure up all sorts of extraordinary events to attract attention.⁸¹ Arguably one of the most original comments of the time was voiced by the German scholar Johann Georg Wachter, who in his *De primordiis Christianae religionis* suggested that Christ, being a member of the Essenes, had remained a perfectly orthodox Jew all his life.⁸²

All these texts have been shown in one way or another to be indebted to Spinoza's *TTP*.⁸³ This mis-reading of the Dutch philosopher, however, was

⁷⁴ *Cymbalum mundi sive Symbolum sapientiae*, 128.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 132. Apparently, very similar sentiments can be found in *La Fausseté des miracles*: Bianchi, 'Impostura religiosa e critica storica'.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁸⁰ Chesneau Du Marsais, *Examen de la religion*, 172.

⁸¹ (Fontenelle) *Traité de la liberté*, 102. Cf. 99: 'les miracles de Jesus Christ et de ses apotres etoient peut etre des effets de la magie naturelle qui produit des choses extraordinaires par la seule force de la nature'. See also Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, Chapter 1.

⁸² Wachter, *De primordiis Christianae religionis*, 33–114. See also Schröder, 'Les essénies plagiés'.

⁸³ For some of the relevant literature, see my *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 167–170.

to be stretched even further in the infamous *Traité des trois imposteurs*, by far the most widely copied clandestine manuscript of the early radical Enlightenment. Composed around 1700, probably in Holland, and published in 1719 in The Hague under the title *L'Esprit de Mr. Benoit de Spinoza*, the identity of its author remains a mystery, and we may never know who was responsible for this *assemblage* of fragments, taken from, among other, Spinoza, Machiavelli, Vanini, Naudé and perhaps even the *Theophrastus redivivus*.⁸⁴ As Silvia Berti has shown, the first chapters contain large, *verbatim* quotes from the *E*, in particular from the appendix to the first part.⁸⁵ But once the *Traité* reaches the figures of Moses and Jesus, its libertine orientation pulverizes the Spinozan foundations, laid out in the first chapters. The fourth chapter on Moses, immediately starts with a passage that according to Berti was added by its publisher Charles Levier, in which the entire libertine heritage reverberates. Exploiting the same classical source as the *Theophrastus redivivus*, Moses is introduced as the grandson of a great Egyptian magician, who by conjuring up ‘quelques tours subtils’ lured the Hebrews into believing his was a divine mission.⁸⁶

Again, the three chapters on Christ are much closer to, for instance, the *Theophrastus redivivus* than to anything written by Spinoza.⁸⁷ For Jesus, our text continues, was also well-versed in Egyptian magic, and he decided to emulate Moses’ example, ‘et se fit suivre de quelques *Idiots*, auxquels il persuada que le SAINT ESPRIT étoit son Père, et qu'une Vierge étoit sa Mère.’⁸⁸ The reason for his success among the Jews is evident: ‘cela arriva dans un tems, où les *Juifs*, laissez de leur DIEU, comme il l'avoient été de leurs *Juges*, vouloient en avoir un visible, ainsi que les

⁸⁴ *Trattato dei tre impostori*. On the basis of the material gathered in Berti, Charles-Daubert, and Popkin (eds.), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free Thought*, it would seem that several Dutch and French ‘authors’ put this text together during the early 1700s, thus combining a roughly materialist ‘Spinozism’ and some of the highlights of the *libertinage érudit*. On the nature of this particular mixture, see Berti, ‘Scepticism and the *Traité des trois imposteurs*’.

⁸⁵ Berti, ‘The First Edition of the *Traité des trois imposteurs*’.

⁸⁶ *Trattato dei tre impostori*, 110. Cf. *Theophrastus redivivus*, II, 436. The common source is Justin Martyr, *Epitoma historiarum philippicarum Pompeii Trogi*, 36, 2, 6–11. See also (Müller), *De imposturis religionum*, 116: ‘Sapientius Moses, qui artibus primo Aegyptiorum occultis, id est astrorum et magiae cultu, dein armorum ferocia Palaestina regulos sedibus extrusit, et sub specie colloquii Pompiliiani fidentem rebus suis exercitum in otiosorum hominum possessiones advexit.’ Schröder, like Gregory, draws particular attention to the relevance of Campanella’s *Atheismus triumphatus*.

⁸⁷ See, for example, *Theophrastus redivivus*, 470, where Christ’s *ignorance* is stressed. The elaborate, subsequent attempts to ridicule Christ’s divinity find no parallel either in the *TTP*. See, however, *Trattato dei tre impostori*, 130–136.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

autres Nations.' Unsurprisingly, there were no scholars or philosophers among his first disciples.⁸⁹ The extent to which his moral philosophy did concur with the classical tradition, was merely a poor reflection of it. As a philosopher, Christ was at best a clever copy-artist.⁹⁰ Much the same may be said of the notorious *Mémoir*, composed by the atheist priest Jean Meslier, who argued that Christ's moral philosophy was essentially erroneous.⁹¹ Even John Toland's *Origines Judaicae* reveals a close affinity to the *Traité*, although according to Toland, there was an important difference to be noted between Moses and Christ. In Toland's view, Moses' private views had to be sharply distinguished from the cult he established in order to keep the Hebrews in their place. Privately, Toland argued, Moses had been a Spinozist!⁹²

4. Conclusion

As far as I can see, the fundamental differences between Spinoza on the one hand and the libertinage and the clandestine radical Enlightenment on the other, in particular regarding the assessment of revealed religion, raises profound questions as to the *nature* of the radical Enlightenment. Some thirty years ago, the concept of an early, radical Enlightenment in Europe, which preceded the High Enlightenment of the latter half of the eighteenth century, was first introduced by Margaret Jacob.⁹³ It was essentially social and political, and very much orientated towards French, Huguenot radicalism in the wake of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the Glorious Revolution. According to Jacob, this culture was essentially pantheist and republican, and much of her understanding of the age rests on the suspicion that, somehow, Spinozism survived the seventeenth century and fuelled early eighteenth-century radicalism.

Recently, the concept of an early, radical Enlightenment has been re-coined by Jonathan Israel, who presents it as a truly European and essentially philosophical movement, originating in the Dutch Republic following the breakthrough of Dutch Cartesianism.⁹⁴ On the basis of a magisterial

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130–140.

⁹¹ Meslier, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 498–510. For Meslier's views regarding Moses' magical background, which largely derive from Naude's *Apologie*, cf. I, 46 ff., 96–97 and 100–105.

⁹² Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 91–96; Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, 128–132.

⁹³ Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment and Living the Enlightenment*.

⁹⁴ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

account of the continuing interest in Spinoza's views, both in the Republic and abroad, Israel has clearly established the reality of 'Spinozism' as a powerful historical force. Meanwhile, Israel's efforts seem to reflect a growing uneasiness among intellectual historians with the recent history of Enlightenment-scholarship, which over the past decades has been dominated not only by an almost exclusive concern with a wide variety of *national 'Enlightenments'*, but also with a strong bias towards 'enlightened' practice.⁹⁵ *Radical Enlightenment* not only reminds us of the European relevance of the ideas involved, but also invites renewed reflection on the very concept of 'Enlightenment', the more so since its publication was preceded by two major works of scholarship that could well be read as attempts to downplay the relevance of the radical Enlightenment.⁹⁶

While most Spinoza-scholars will readily agree with Israel that Spinoza's works reflect a philosophical depth and a coherence that would only be encountered again in the rise of German Idealism, and while they themselves have provided much of the material upon which Israel builds his case, it remains to be seen how Spinoza's philosophy relates to what is commonly perceived as 'the' Enlightenment view of God, nature, and man. It could well be argued that since Spinoza was no materialist, and was instead deeply concerned with the notion of 'salvation', and, as we have seen, not at all of the opinion that Moses and Jesus were impostors in any way, it is questionable to regard him as the precursor of, most notably, the French High Enlightenment.⁹⁷ For the moment, and in conclusion, I should like to suggest that from an intellectual point of view, the recognition of Spinoza's deep impact on the early Enlightenment should raise our awareness of the intellectual wealth of the Enlightenment from the very outset. From its first beginnings, it resisted shallow caricature. Clearly, once we recognize that Spinoza's thought did belong to the heart of the Enlightenment as an intellectual enterprise, and unless we are prepared to concur with Spinoza's early critics that what he wrote on revealed religion in general and on Moses and Jesus in particular was essentially insincere, it would seem that in the making of modernity there was much more on offer than the eighteenth-century Trinity of atheism,

⁹⁵ Very influential: Venturi, *Settecento Riformatore* and Porter and Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context*. By far the most sophisticated attempt to characterize the Dutch Enlightenment has recently been supplied by Kloek and Mijnhardt: 1800: *Blueprints for a National Community*.

⁹⁶ I mean, of course, Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* and Porter, *Enlightenment*.

⁹⁷ See, for example, De Dijn, *Spinoza and Bartuschat, Spinozas Theorie des Menschen*.

deism, and fideism would suggest, regardless of the fact that the precise nature of this alternative is still very much a matter of debate.

Perhaps a final caveat is in place, for it cannot be denied that during the eighteenth century, the positive aspects of Spinoza's assessment of religion failed to attract the kind of attention that the more polemical side of his naturalism received. As a consequence, any attempt to incorporate the 'real', that is the 'full' Spinoza into our understanding of the Enlightenment runs the risk of conflating the historical and the philosophical ramifications of the concept of Enlightenment. On the other hand, a 'Spinozan' approach to the eighteenth century appears particularly appropriate for any understanding of the way in which the German *Pantheismusstreit* prepared the demise of the Enlightenment and the rise of Romanticism. For once Mendelssohn and Jacobi started to discuss 'Gott' during the 1780s, it was again Spinoza's philosophy that was at issue.⁹⁸ Again, the matter of Spinoza's atheism became a crucial topic of debate. By this time, however, Spinoza's conception of nature drew all the attention. And what is more, by this time the idea of religious imposture seems to have run its course. For Toland's suggestion that Moses had been a secret Spinozist '*ante Spinozam*' was picked up by the German philosopher and freemason Karl Leonhard Reinhold, who in 1786 published his *Hebräischen Mysterien*, arguing that Moses had fused the Hebrew Jehovah with the Egyptian recognition of the divinity of Nature as such. Moses, according to Reinhold, had only been forced to hide his Hermetic Spinozism on account of the ignorance of his people.⁹⁹ But even earlier, Lessing, whose confession to Jacobi in 1780 that at heart he was a Spinozist had actually triggered the *Pantheismusstreit*, had more or less buried the three-impostor thesis. Only weeks prior to his conversation with Jacobi, *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* had been published. Only months earlier, *Nathan der Weise* had been staged. By turning the idea of religious imposture into a parable in favour of religious *toleration*, Lessing, like Reinhold a mason, had at least reached a Spinozist conclusion.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ See, for example, Christ, *Jacobi und Mendelssohn*; Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption*, 172 ff.; Pätzold, *Spinoza, Aufklärung, Idealismus* and Tavoillot, *Le Crépuscule des Lumières*.

⁹⁹ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 115 ff. As will be familiar, only several decades later, commenting in his *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834) on Goethe's alleged 'Spinozism', Heinrich Heine would turn this Egyptian-Spinozan pantheism into 'the secret religion' of Germany: Heine, *Werke*, VIII-1, 62.

¹⁰⁰ The precise nature of Lessing's alleged 'Spinozism' is a moot point among Lessing-scholars. See, for example, Detlev Pätzold, 'Lessing und Spinoza' and *Spinoza, Aufklärung, Idealismus*, Chapter 4.

CHAPTER SIX

THE POLITICS OF THE PASSIONS

...to organise a state in such a way as leaves no place for wrongdoing, or better still, to frame such a constitution that every man, whatever be his character, will set public right before private advantage, this is the task, this the toil.¹

A few months before Spinoza passed away, on 21 February 1677, the Dutch philosopher was visited in The Hague by a young and ambitious German diplomat by the name of Leibniz. According to Leibniz, Spinoza, ‘said to me that on the day of the massacre of the De Witts’—who, as will be only too familiar, in August 1672 were lynched in The Hague by a furious mob, panicking after the French had invaded the Republic—he wanted to go out at night and post a placard near the site of the massacre, reading *ultimi barbarorum*. But his host locked the house to keep him from going out, for he would be exposed to being torn to pieces’.²

This is one of the very few, if not the only reliable account we have of an instance in Spinoza’s life where he appears to have lost control over his passions. According to Jean-Maximilien Lucas, probably the earliest biographer of Spinoza, ‘he shed tears when he saw his fellow-citizens rend to pieces one who was a father to them all, and although he knew better than anybody what men are capable of, he could not but shudder at that cruel sight.’ But soon, the story continues, Spinoza regained his posture, commenting ‘Of what use would wisdom be to us if after falling into the passions of the people we had not the strength to raise ourselves by our own efforts?’³

From Spinoza’s own perspective, however, this comment should not be read as an expression of shame on the part of a man usually in full control of himself, for according to Spinoza’s *E*, there is nothing to be ashamed of once we acknowledge the *causes* of our behaviour. Instead of judging human conduct, we should try to *understand* it. In the *TP*, Spinoza specifically declares to:

¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologicopoliticus*, 252–253.

² Nadler, *Spinoza*, 306.

³ Gullan-Whur, *Within Reason*, 248.

have taken great care to understand human actions, and not to deride, deplore, or denounce them. I have therefore regarded human passions (...) not as vices of human nature, but rather as properties which belong to it in the same way as heat, cold, storm, thunder and the like belong to the nature of the atmosphere (*TP* I, 4).⁴

In view of the truly horrendous nature of the events of August 1672—Johan and Cornelis de Witt were actually cannibalised, parts of Johan's body were sold as items of curiosity, and the Age of True Freedom came to an end when William III regained the stadholderate of the House of Orange—any supporter of the stadholderless regime had every right to be shocked. As a matter of fact, in view of the well-orchestrated nature of the attack on the De Witts, it would be naive to consider it the outcome of a spontaneous revolt by the common man.⁵ This was a bloody coup and every right-minded Dutch republican was in shock, and so was Spinoza, or so it would seem. The fact that he was prepared to relate the events to Leibniz, a man he otherwise did not trust (we know Spinoza asked his friends *not* to show him manuscripts of the *E*),⁶ seems to confirm that he did not repent his initial reaction.

1. Caute: *Spinoza as a 'Political Philosopher'*

But what does this event tell us about the politics of the public display of passions? Revealing though it may seem, there are at least two important reasons to be sceptical about its relevance. To begin with, it is still far from clear how Spinoza should be related to the flourishing enterprise commonly referred to as the History of Political Thought. So far, the two main authorities of this relatively recent discipline have hardly dealt with the author of the *TPP* (1670) and *TP* (1677). Neither John Pocock nor Quentin Skinner has given his writings much thought, and recent surveys such as Iain Hampsher-Monk's also ignore the Dutch philosopher.⁷ The equally popular *Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700* awards Spinoza a quarter of the number of pages devoted to Grotius.⁸ The few specialists that have addressed Spinoza's political thought have done so either in

⁴ Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, 288–289.

⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 796 ff.

⁶ Spinoza, *Letters*, 330–331 (Letter 72).

⁷ Hampsher-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Theory*.

⁸ Burns and Goldie (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought*, 545–572.

order to clarify its relationship to his general metaphysics⁹ or to assess his place in the history of Dutch 'republicanism'.¹⁰ The fact that it has turned out to be very difficult to relate this indigenous tradition to its Italian and English counterparts may well have been instrumental in relegating Spinoza to the lower divisions of the History of Political Thought. As a consequence, in the English-speaking world Spinoza is still mainly known for his metaphysics and to some extent for his moral psychology.

A second, more fundamental reason to be suspicious about the relevance of Leibniz' story, is related to what Spinoza actually wrote on politics, for in spite of the detail with which he dealt with the passions in the *E*, it would seem as if Spinoza in his political writings simply did not care much about either the moral or the psychological qualities necessary for a politician to be successful. Although Spinoza for instance in two fine chapters *On Monarchy* comes up with all sorts of suggestions to secure the rule of the Prince, these comments are all of a strictly *constitutional* nature. 'A dominion then', he argues in the *TP*,

whose well-being depends on any man's good faith, and whose affairs cannot be properly administered, unless those who are engaged in them will act honestly, will be very unstable. On the contrary, to insure its permanence, its public affairs should be so ordered that those who administer them, whether guided by reason or passion, cannot be led to act treacherously or basely. Nor does it matter to the security of a dominion, in what spirit men are led to rightly administer its affairs. For liberality of spirit, or courage, is a private virtue; but the virtue of a state is its security. (*TP*, 1, 6)

The most detailed analysis Spinoza supplies of a real politician is to be found in the *TTP*, in his assessment of Moses' actions following the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. He goes out of his way to demonstrate the wisdom of Moses, although he feels Moses himself did not *understand* why he was so successful in establishing the Hebrew nation.¹¹ Again, the main lessons to be drawn from Spinoza's assessment of Moses' life are strictly constitutional. The example of Moses shows us, for instance, how

⁹ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*; Den Uyl, *Power, State and Freedom*; Balibar, *Spinoza et la politique*; Lloyd and Gatens, *Collective Imaginings*.

¹⁰ Kossmann, *Political Thought in the Dutch Republic*; Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice*; Blom, *Morality and Causality*; Prokhorovnik, *Spinoza and Republicanism*. Recently, however, Verbeek has questioned Spinoza's 'Republicanism': *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, Chapter 5. For a critical analysis of the very concept of early modern 'Republicanism' and the way in which it has been dealt with in recent scholarship, see Zagorin, 'Republicanism'.

¹¹ See Chapter 4.

dangerous it is to establish a monarchy over a people unaccustomed to living under kings, and how careful one should be in allowing the clergy to interfere with the public domain. However, although Spinoza leaves us blissfully ignorant of Moses' personality or even of his particular virtues, we shall see that in his analysis of the Hebrew theocracy established by Moses, Spinoza regards Moses' constitutional policies as having been successful, precisely to the extent that they succeeded in controlling the passions of its subjects.

We know that Spinoza admired Machiavelli—he calls him ‘acutissimus’ (*TP*, 5, 7 and 10, 1)—and revered Tacitus as much as any Renaissance humanist, but the well-known dialectic of (manly) *virtus* and (female) *fortuna* which gave impetus to the emergence of modern political thought is extremely difficult to relate to Spinoza’s own world view, characterised as it is by the *lack* of a proper anthropology, as Alexandre Matheron once put it.¹² For according to the *E*, man is not the centre of the universe nor the starting point of philosophical enquiry, man is a *product* of nature, a highly particular combination, that is, of modifications of Substance. Man is nothing but an *effect* of the infinite power of Substance or Nature as such (*E*, II, 10schol.). Descartes’ foundational *cogito* simply evaporates in Spinoza’s metaphysics. The fact that ‘I think’ is pretty irrelevant in the *E*, which only notes that ‘man thinks’ (*E*, II, ax. 2). This, incidentally, constitutes a major obstacle to all those who claim, like Jonathan Israel has done recently, that Spinoza is the first truly ‘modern’ philosopher.¹³ Although Israel in my view is absolutely right in highlighting the momentous impact Spinoza had on the early Enlightenment, and although I fully sympathise with the way in which he chastises eighteenth-century scholarship that continues to present the Enlightenment as the outcome of Voltaire’s admiration of Locke, from a philosophical perspective it remains to be seen what Spinoza’s ‘modernity’ amounted to, for ever since Descartes ‘modern’ philosophy has been obsessed with the *subject*. Spinoza was not. If anything, he was a forerunner of postmodernism—it was no coincidence that he was re-discovered in the late 1960s by a number of French intellectuals, including Gilles Deleuze.¹⁴

¹² Matheron, *Anthropologie et politique au XVII^e siècle*, 17–27. On Spinoza’s Machiavelianism, see Curley, ‘Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan’.

¹³ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

¹⁴ See in particular Deleuze, *Spinoza. Philosophie pratique*. See also Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*; Montag and Stolze (eds.), *The New Spinoza*.

One of the aspects Deleuze most admired in Spinoza's philosophy was the latter's insistence that any normative analysis of human behaviour overlooks the fact that concepts such as 'good' and 'evil' have no real content and that there is no such thing as a faculty called 'the will', let alone a 'free will'. Again, Spinoza is not and cannot be genuinely interested in such questions as whether politicians should be allowed to show their emotions, or why they do so in the first place. Politicians are people, and people are natural beings, driven by natural causes. Let's return to Spinoza's outburst of anger in August 1672. Could we perhaps try and understand what was going on here from Spinoza's own perspective? I think we can, for the fourth part of the *E* provides a highly detailed assessment of a long list of specific emotions, including the ones that at the time seem to have overcome the Dutch philosopher. Even a cursory glance at Spinoza's analysis of the emotions involved demonstrates his refusal to attach any normative value to the passions as such.

2. *The Politics of the Passions*

First, let's assume Spinoza was *angry* when he found out De Witt had been killed. 'Anger', the *E* tells us, 'is a desire by which we are spurred, from hate, to do evil to one we hate' (*E*, III, def. aff. 36). This is only natural, for, 'He who hates someone will strive to do evil to him unless he fears that a greater evil to himself will arrive from this' (*E*, III, 39). Apart from the fact that we now see why Spinoza, despite his anger, did *not* go out to face the mob but stayed at home, we also see why this should be so, once we understand that 'To hate someone is to imagine him as the cause of one's sadness; and so he who hates someone will strive to remove or destroy him' (*E*, III, 39dem.). Again, this is obvious once we perceive that 'hate is nothing but sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause', which implies that 'one who hates strives to remove and destroy the things he hates' (*E*, III, 13schol.). May we assume, then, that Spinoza somehow came to regret his outburst of anger? Probably not. Following the *E*, no wise man is able to repent anything, for 'Repentance is a sadness accompanied by the idea of some deed we believe ourselves to have done from a free decision of the mind' (*E*, III, def. aff. 37) and 'Repentance is not a virtue or does not arise from reason; instead, he who repents what he has done is twice wretched, or lacking in power' (*E*, IV, 54)—the wise man *knows* that no such free actions exist (*E*, II, 48–49). Of course, it is perfectly understandable that most people do believe that, somehow, they are free,

but this merely proves that most people are unaware of the causal powers that in reality determine their actions (*E*, I, app.; II, 35schol.).

So on the one hand it would seem that in his treatment of the passions, Spinoza simply fails to take into account the distinction between the private and the public domains, and limits himself to describing the nature of the passions as such. In itself this is an interesting fact, if only in view of the major importance Spinoza bestowes on the same distinction in his treatment of *religion*. His argument in favour of the freedom 'to philosophise' is largely based on the view that *true religion* is an essentially private affair and that the public power of the church should be minimal. Only by curbing the political power of the clergy can intellectual freedom be secured, Spinoza argues in the *TPP*. On the other hand, however, he is adamant in his insistence on the crucial importance of the passions to understanding politics as such. The very fact that there *are* societies, that people live together in the first place, to his mind can only be accounted for by analysing the nature of man's passionate life. For in direct opposition to Hobbes' contractualism, Spinoza conceives of the origins of society not as the result of an artificial decision, a breaking away from the natural state of affairs; on the contrary, to his mind human beings are naturally inclined to bond, to stick together, to form societies, which as a consequence should be understood as perfectly natural creations. In a letter to Jelles, Spinoza reduced 'the difference between Hobbes and myself' to the insight 'that I always preserve the natural right in its entirety'.¹⁵ The *polis*, to put it differently, is a natural product of the power of the passions.

Interestingly, we find the first obvious reference Spinoza makes to the political significance of his moral psychology, in the *scholium* added to the last proposition (49) of the second part of the *E*, the proposition, that is, in which the freedom of the mind is denied: 'this doctrine', Spinoza claims,

contributes to social life insofar as it teaches to hate no one, to disesteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry at no one, to envy no one; and also insofar as it teaches that each of us should be content with his own things, and should be helpful to his neighbour, not from unmanly passions, partiality or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand.

'I shall show this', he claims finally, 'in the Fourth Part'. And so he does, for in the fourth part of the *E* he puts forward a theory of man's natural

¹⁵ Spinoza, *Letters*, 258 (Letter 50).

sociability based on the following presuppositions (which in the *E* are of course all demonstrated ‘geometrically’):

- 1) that every mode, being a mode of Substance, or God, expresses God’s infinite causal power. *E*, I, 16: ‘From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect’);
- 2) that ‘reason’ ‘starts’ where ‘common notions’ are being discovered, that is, where we perceive what things—in general—have in common (*E*, II, 37 ff.); please note that according to Spinoza reason is not a *faculty*; being a strict nominalist, Spinoza is only interested in the succession of ideas—‘the order and connection’ of which can be either inadequate or adequate, that is ‘rational’, for they can be either in accordance with the properties things have in common, or not;
- 3) that every mode—expressing God’s infinite power—‘strives to persevere in its being’ (*E*, III, 6);
- 4) that the way we are affected by other modes results in passions that are manifestations either of sadness—in the event they hinder, or of joy, when they enhance our striving towards perseverance (*E*, III–IV);
- 5) that no passion is stronger than the joy produced by understanding rationally why we are affected in the way that we are by the events that happen to us. (*E*, V, 3: ‘An affect that is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it.’)

As a consequence, it is only natural, for highly conducive to our well-being, and in line with our ‘*conatus*’ to persevere in our existence, to develop a reasonable ‘outlook’, which, as we saw, is based on our insight into what we have in common with other things. Since human beings cannot fail to observe that they have more in common with other human beings than with clouds, or bricks, or shellfish, it is equally clear that we have a natural interest in what happens to those other, fellow human beings.¹⁶ We are naturally inclined ‘to feel for them’, since we cannot fail to imagine that what happens to them *might* happen to us as well. In fact, it is perfectly reasonable to feel ‘with’ the other—reason being based on what is *common*, in this case: between human beings. Of course it makes a difference whether we hate the person in question or love him—when we love him

¹⁶ See in particular Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Part II and Balibar, *Spinoza et la politique*, Chapter 4.

we will be bound to enjoy our fellow man's happiness, and when we hate our neighbour we will enjoy his misery—but a truly wise man is unable to hate anyone, since he will understand why he might be inclined to hate the man or woman in question in the first place. And once we do so, Spinoza claims, the joy over our insight into the way we are affected by this very harmful passion will take precedence over the hate. Put simply, this entails, for instance, that although it is only natural to occasionally feel jealousy—another very harmful passion, of course—one ceases to be jealous the moment one grasps the *reasons* for being jealous.

I must admit that I have always been rather sceptical about this last claim—the claim that a truly wise man is unable to enjoy the misfortunes of those he hates, indeed that he is incapable of hating anyone. And that jealousy ceases the moment we fully appreciate *why* we are jealous. A Spinozist might well argue that this only demonstrates that I am not a wise man, but I can't say that I find that reply very helpful. I'm afraid it reveals an essentially Socratic or Platonic outlook on morality, based on the highly implausible view that in the end morality—careful as we should be in using the term when discussing a naturalist philosopher such as Spinoza—hinges on *insight*. In short, Spinoza argues that man's tendency to seek the company of other men is the product of his—highly reasonable—insight into what he has in common with other men, and that it serves his self-interest. *E*, IV, 35 has two crucially important *schemata*, summing it all up: 'There is no singular thing in nature which is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason' and 'When each man seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to another'. These observations do not reveal a cynical proto-liberalism such as Bernard Mandeville's, they are the outcome of both a very detailed metaphysics, trying to define individual 'modes' in the context of 'Substance', and of an equally refined moral psychology defining man's passions as the necessary outcome of his constant interaction with the rest of Nature.

What is more, this philosophical reconstruction of the passionate basis for the natural emergence of societies ultimately serves a strictly eschatological purpose. In the appendix to the fourth part of the *E*, Spinoza concludes that man is best advised to form 'a common society'. Recognizing the common interests that bind us is indeed the first 'reasonable' act as such. But in itself it is only the first step towards the ultimate 'goal' of the *E*, the recognition that man's 'highest good' resides in what according to the fifth and final part of the *E* is called 'the intellectual love of God'—a phrase that has often puzzled commentators. Unfortunately, it has tradi-

tionally been used by many experts to play down the political impact of Spinoza's philosophy as such. Many experts seem somehow obliged to interpret Spinoza *either* as a philosopher who is interesting on account of the technical quality of his particular contribution to seventeenth-century debates on metaphysics, the theory of mind, and politics, but who also held highly obscure views on man's 'salvation', *or* as a sage—as a thinker who brilliantly attempted to use a seventeenth-century conceptual vocabulary in order to formulate a vision that ultimately transcends any specific philosophical idiom. The result has been widespread confusion on the final propositions of the *E*. Jonathan Bennett, otherwise an admirer, once famously called them 'rubbish': 'Worse, it is dangerous rubbish that causes others to write rubbish'.¹⁷

Much of the confusion relating to Spinoza's use of quasi-mystical metaphors disappears once we recognize that Spinoza's political philosophy is the direct outcome of his metaphysics, which in turn was directly aimed at formulating a view of man's *summum bonum*. For the intellectual, 'intuitive' love of God Spinoza writes about in the fifth part of the *E* is really no more than the highest form of knowledge as such. Since every moment of insight necessarily produces a certain degree of joy, and since no object of insight is more encompassing than God or Nature as such, insight into the whole of nature obviously will produce a kind of joy so overwhelming that it must be love. And although there is a long tradition in philosophy identifying wisdom with an essentially *individual* achievement, it would seem that in Spinoza's eyes, the kind of wisdom that 'liberates' as he puts it, is very much the product of a *collective* effort. Indeed, this is also why 'democracy' according to the *TTP* is the most natural form of government, for 'in a democracy there is less danger of a government behaving unreasonably, for it is practically impossible for the majority of a single assembly, if it is of some size, to agree on the same piece of folly'.¹⁸

In fact, this final, tentative observation on the ultimate coherence of Spinozism as a comprehensive philosophy brings us back to the distinction between the private and the public. For if it is indeed the case that metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, political and moral philosophy are intimately connected in this particular world view, the distinction

¹⁷ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 374.

¹⁸ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 242. Cf. 243: 'in a democratic state nobody transfers his natural right to another so completely that therefore he is not to be consulted; he transfers it to the majority of the entire community of which he is part. In this way all men remain equal, as they were before in the state of nature'.

itself seems to lose significance. It is *not* our *individuality* which makes us human, Spinoza argues, but our *rationality*, and we recognise our humanity by our understanding of what we have *in common* with other human beings. There is nothing really interesting about the fact that we are also different from other human beings. *E*, IV, 34 and 35 put it succinctly: ‘Insofar as men are torn by affects which are passions, they can be contrary to one another’—‘Only insofar as men live according to the guide of reason, must they always agree in nature.’ What makes us human is the fact that by acting reasonably we naturally form communities. It is only in communities that we fully prosper and realise true freedom: ‘A man who is guided by reason is more free in a state, where he lives according to a common decision, than in solitude, where he obeys only himself’ (*E*, IV, 73).

As we have seen, this highly particular assessment of the relationship between the public and the private is rooted deeply in Spinoza’s metaphysics and his theory of knowledge since it is based on the concept of ‘*notiones communes*’, which defines what may be called ‘reasonable’. That it really belongs to the heart of his philosophical enterprise is further suggested by the fact that it occurs as early as the *ST*, a text that was probably completed around 1660. Teaching knowledge to one’s neighbours, Spinoza argues, ‘brings forth the same desire in them that there is in me, so that their will and mine become one and the same, always agreeing about everything’ (*ST*, II, 26, 4). To put it differently: in a community of the wise concord cannot fail to emerge.

3. Conclusion

Meanwhile, Spinoza fully recognised that in reality no such ‘wise’ community exists. In the case in which man is being denied his natural quest for knowledge, a sharp distinction between private desires and public regulations becomes crucially important. In fact, Spinoza published his *TTP* precisely out of fear that the relatively tolerant politics of the Dutch Republic might give way to the authoritarian tendencies within the Dutch Reformed Church. Commentators such as Leo Strauss, who have stressed the ‘timeless’ quality of Spinoza’s political thought, arguing that he wrote ‘for posterity rather than for his contemporaries’,¹⁹ are seriously mistaken, I’m afraid. Spinoza’s *TTP* in particular is a near perfect example of a text

¹⁹ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 153.

that cries out for contextualisation—only by putting it in its Dutch context are we able, for instance, to understand the meaning of Spinoza's comments on the Hebrew theocracy.²⁰ In Spinoza's view the most serious threat to the Republic came not from the civil authorities but from an over-ambitious clergy, that attempted to turn the truth of its essentially private faith into a political programme.

It has often been noted that '1672' actually marked something of a turning point in Spinoza's philosophical *Werdegang* in that it provoked a reassessment of the role of the passions in political life. If we define the aim of Spinoza's *politica* to find a balance between the demands of freedom and security, then the *TTP* is definitely more concerned with the former, whereas the *TP* clearly emphasises the latter. Comparing both treatises, Étienne Balibar even wrote of two different 'universes'.²¹ According to the *TP*, a text Spinoza started writing in 1675 and which remained unfinished at the time of his death, the same desire for communality responsible for the natural emergence of societies is also held responsible for the fact 'that every individual wishes the rest to live after his own mind, and to approve what he approves, and reject what he rejects': 'And so it comes to pass, that, as all are equally eager to be first, they fall to strife, and do their utmost mutually to oppress one another; and he who comes out conqueror is more proud of the harm he has done to the other, than of the good he has done to himself' (*TP*, 1, 5).

Accordingly, Spinoza in the *TP* makes a special effort to demonstrate the benefits of establishing a 'civil state', in which 'all fear the same things, and all have the same ground of security, and manner of life' (*TP*, 3, 3). Apparently, the institution of a state is as such to be applauded, since it affects the very passions that gave rise to the state in the first place and 'the highest exercise of charity is that which aims at keeping peace and joining in unity' (*TP*, 3, 10): 'that dominion is the best where men pass their lives in unity' (*TP*, 5, 2).²² And since every 'commonwealth' is surrounded by others and since 'two commonwealths are naturally enemies' (*TP*, 3, 13), the need for unity is even greater.²³ Indeed, the upholding of

²⁰ Van Bunge, 'Spinoza's Jewish Identity' and *From Stevin to Spinoza*.

²¹ Balibar, *Spinoza et la politique*, 63. See also Matheron, 'Le problème de l'évolution de Spinoza'.

²² Cf. Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 239: 'in order to achieve a secure and good life, men had necessarily to unite in one body'.

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 245: 'although two different states may make a treaty of mutual non-aggression, they nevertheless try as far as they can to prevent the other from becoming too powerful'.

a viable state demands ‘fear and reverence’ (*TP*, 4, 4). Those who are in power are therefore obliged to preserve their ‘majesty’. Public displays of contempt for the rulers of any state cannot be tolerated, Spinoza argued in the wake of ‘1672’. But even in the *TP* already, the notion of obedience is of crucial importance. First, since revealed religion finds its basis in obedience to the rules of biblical morality,²⁴ and second because the persistence of any ‘dominion’ depends on the obedience of its subjects:

although command cannot be exercised over minds in the same way as over tongues, yet minds are to some degree under the control of the sovereign power, who has many means of inducing the great majority to believe, love, hate etc. whatever he wills. Thus, although it is not by direct command of the sovereign power that these results are produced, yet experience abundantly testifies they often proceed from the authoritative nature of his power and from his guidance, that is, from his right. Therefore there is no absurdity in conceiving men whose beliefs, love, hatred, contempt and every single emotion is under the sole control of the governing power.²⁵

It is precisely because states need to be powerful that the science of politics— informed by a social psychology and rooted in a proper metaphysics—should concentrate on constitutional matters and that subjects have to be prepared to exercise obedience. As indicated above, in his comments on the Hebrew theocracy established by Moses, Spinoza combined both elements, for in this particular example he recognised a state that was indeed in full control of the most intimate thoughts and passions of its subjects.²⁶ More in particular, Moses managed to instill a vital combination of patriotism and piety, combined with unconditional obedience to the rule of law: ‘nobody desired what was forbidden, and all desired what was commanded’.²⁷ It was only when the original constitution devised by Moses fell apart that the Hebrew nation collapsed. In particular the original localisation of religious authority was neglected, creating religious divisions and political instability. Following the fall of Israel, the religious authorities need to be held under control, Spinoza argued, and this only adds to the necessity to create strong secular states.²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 283: ‘We may therefore conclude with finality that religion, whether revealed by the natural light or by prophecy, acquires the force of command solely from the decree of those who have the right to command, and that God has no special kingdom over men save through those who hold the sovereignty’. Cf. 286.

By the same token, even as a young man Spinoza must have been fully aware of the dangers inherent in publicising his own, private views. As early as the 1660s he revealed in his letters his concern over the way his views would be perceived beyond the Amsterdam ‘circle’ of friends and companions, who supported him after he was banned from the Jewish community. In 1668 one of his best friends, Adriaan Koerbagh, had been arrested by the Amsterdam magistrate for propagating Spinozist, that is ‘atheist’ ideas.²⁹ Koerbagh died in jail shortly afterwards. The ‘tolerant’ Republic could be very repressive indeed. As a result, the *TTP* was published anonymously, and Spinoza was fully prepared to accommodate some of his more provocative conclusions regarding the nature of faith, the status of Scripture and the competence of theology ‘*ad captum vulgi*’. He saw perfectly well that on occasion there is no harm in hiding some of your more private thoughts for the greater public benefit. Just listen to the concluding remarks of the *TTP*:

It only remains for me to state expressly that [this treatise] contains nothing that I would not willingly submit to the scrutiny and judgement of my country’s government. If they consider any part of my writing to be contrary to the laws of my country or to be prejudicial to the general good, I retract it. I know that I am human, and may have erred. Yet I have taken pains not to err, and I have made it my prime object that whatever I have written should be in complete accord with my country’s laws, with piety, and with morality.³⁰

On occasion even the ‘abnormal’ philosopher that Spinoza was according to some of his most recent admirers, could be perfectly conventional.³¹

²⁹ See, most recently, Wielema, ‘Adriaan Koerbagh: Biblical Criticism and Enlightenment’.

³⁰ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 299.

³¹ Cf. Negri, *L’Anomie sauvage*; Zagorin, *Ways of Lying*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CAUSATION AND INTELLIGIBILITY IN THE *TRACTATUS THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS*

There is every reason to expect Spinoza to be highly sceptical as regards the possibility of formulating religious truths, for the *E* delivers an essentially secular moral philosophy providing a strictly intellectual path to ‘salvation’. What is more, according to the *TPP* it is necessary to separate philosophy from theology: whereas philosophy produces truth, theology is solely concerned with obedience. It would seem, then, that in Spinoza’s thought little room is left for the possibility of arriving at real religious truths.¹ In this chapter, however, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that Spinoza’s philosophy awards religion a rationality of its own.

1. *Causation and Intelligibility: Spinoza’s Rationalism*

The general assumption that Spinoza was some sort of epistemological rationalist is shared widely among scholars of early modern philosophy, as is the recognition that Spinoza’s rationalism is closely connected to his views concerning causation. Causality is, of course, a crucial concept in Spinoza’s entire philosophy: on the one hand it defines the ontological status of everything that according to the *E* can be said to exist, on the other it also takes pride of place in Spinoza’s theory of knowledge in that he adhered to the essentially Aristotelian position that we can only be considered to know anything to the extent that we know its cause.

However, in order to fully grasp the nature of Spinoza’s rationalism, some further comments may be in order before we address the issue in which sense Spinoza is able to recognize the reality of religious truths. As far as Spinoza’s metaphysics is concerned, causality serves as its unique principle of ontological distribution: Nature perceived as cause is *natura naturans*, nature perceived as an effect is *natura naturata* (*E*, I, 29schol.). God, or all his attributes, is *causa sui* (*E*, I, 10schol.), while his modes are

¹ For a good example of this line of reasoning, see Cook, ‘Did Spinoza Lie to his Landlady?’

caused by other modes, which in the end, that is as part of all modes taken together (or, as Spinoza puts it in Letter 64 *'facies totius universi'*) are caused by the attributes. Indeed, it is God's essence to be the immanent cause of all things (*E*, I, 18), while it is the essence of modes to be caused by God, that is by one of God's attributes: in the case of man, for instance, Spinoza notes that his essence 'is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes' (*E*, II, 10cor.). And, finally, the 'reach' if you will of causation is infinite, since, *E*, I, 36: 'Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow'. In short: 1) *every* thing that exists has a cause for its existence; 2) *what* a thing is, is decided by the kind of cause it has; 3) *every* thing is *itself* a cause, producing further effects.

Spinoza's theory of knowledge is also crucially dependent on the concept of causality even if at first sight the essential propositions of *E* II in which Spinoza expounds his theory of knowledge are mainly concerned to reveal what the mind is, how it relates to God and his attribute of thought as well as to his infinite intellect, and in particular how the mind, which according to Spinoza *is* an idea, can be understood *to have* ideas. But again, this theory results from the conclusion, reached in *E*, I, 16 that '(F)rom the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect)': the mind as a finite mode is a product of the infinite causal force that is the attribute of thought.

Once the nature of the mind itself has been explicated, the universal reality of causality is reaffirmed in the *E*, for according to Spinoza—*E*, II, 44—'It is of the nature of reason to regard things as necessary, not as contingent'. Again man serves as a further illustration, for—*E*, II, 48dem.—'The mind (...) cannot be a free cause of its own actions, or cannot have an absolute faculty of willing and not willing. Rather, it must be determined to willing this or that (...) by a cause which is also determined by another, and so on.' Many commentators have wrestled with the question how Spinoza's comments on modes being caused by God's attributes should be related to his recurring remarks according to which modes are 'in' God. One could of course join Martial Gueroult's line of interpretation and subscribe to his attempt to take this literally: modes are caused by God in himself, but I am not sure how helpful this approach really is.² Perhaps Michael Della Rocca's recent proposal to reduce both inherence and causation to kinds of dependence, that is of *conceptual dependence*,

² Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, esp. 325 ff.

will turn out to be more rewarding: 'both inherence and mere causation', he writes, 'are kinds of dependence, but for Spinoza, by virtue of his rationalism, they are ultimately the same kind of dependence, and that is conceptual dependence tout court.'³

Although I am not convinced Della Rocca is right in maintaining that this application of Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason allows him, for instance, to offer a necessitarian reading of the *E* and to argue in favour of mind-body identity in the *E* in the way that he does,⁴ his claim that it is precisely Spinoza's commitment to the PSR that reveals Spinoza to have been perhaps the most thorough rationalist in the history of philosophy, seems to me basically correct:

Thus the causation of one thing by another is nothing but one thing making the other intelligible. Our place in the world simply is the way in which we are explained by certain things and can serve to make intelligible—i.e. explain—certain other things.⁵

While Spinoza's rationalism may not be in dispute, there is less agreement among experts, or so it seems to me, on the way in which Spinoza's views on causation and intelligibility have informed the *TTP*, his second masterpiece. Indeed, this book has continued to confuse its readers for a variety of reasons. Quite apart from the obvious stylistic gap between the *E* and this, his second, 'neglected masterpiece' as Edwin Curley once called it, the *TTP* has also baffled scholars because of its many layers.⁶ It is several books in one and this has no doubt added considerably to the confusion, for it is a party-political pamphlet as well as a first attempt to launch at least parts of his mature philosophy in the making, while it is also precisely what its title promises to deliver, namely an attempt to chart the 'theologico-political' as a proper subject of philosophical enquiry.

The multi-layered nature of the *TTP* does not really threaten the essential coherence of Spinoza's philosophical project. Rather, or so I shall attempt to demonstrate, it reveals the limits of rational enquiry in the

³ Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 67.

⁴ On Spinoza's supposed necessitarianism, see *E*, II, 31cor. in which the duration of finite bodies is demonstrated to be contingent. As far as Spinoza's view on the relationship between mind and body is concerned, I fail to see how his (Cartesian) emphasis on the 'real distinction' between separate attributes can result in the recognition that the products of these attributes are really identical—despite *E*, II, 21 and schol.: the very fact that the mind has the body as its *object* only confirms their separation.

⁵ Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 2.

⁶ Curley, 'Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece' and 'Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece (II)'.

context of Spinoza's metaphysics, according to which the human mind is a part of God's infinite intellect, existing at a certain place, during a definite period of time. In the fourth chapter of the *TPP* Spinoza, in a passage that seems to provide the key to much of what follows, argues that:

(w)e ought to define and explain things through their proximate causes. Generalisations about fate and the interconnection of causes can be of no service to us in informing and ordering our thoughts concerning particular things. Furthermore, we plainly have no knowledge as to the actual co-ordination and interconnection of things—that is, the way in which things are in actual fact ordered and connected—so that for practical purposes it is better, indeed, essential to consider things as contingent.⁷

In this chapter I should like to concentrate on four specific domains, that together are essential to all epistemological claims relating to religion: 1. prophetic imagination; 2. origins of Scripture; 3. arguably the most difficult issue: salvation by obedience, or, as Alexandre Matheron has put it, '*le salut des ignorants*'; and finally, 4. the question as to the identity of Christ.⁸

2. Prophetic Imagination

As far as the prophetic imagination is concerned, let's first recall that according to the *TPP* it is not opposed to natural knowledge. On the contrary: 'Prophecy, or Revelation', Spinoza writes, 'is the sure *knowledge* (my italics) of some matter revealed by God to man', from which it follows, as Spinoza argues, 'that natural knowledge can be called prophecy, for the knowledge that we acquire by the natural light of reason depends solely on knowledge of God and of his eternal decrees'.⁹ Spinoza is equally clear about the causes of prophecy: they are to be sought in the nature of the mind, which constitutes its 'primary cause'.¹⁰ Biblical evidence concerning instances of genuine prophecy enable Spinoza to be more precise: both the real image of an angel witnessed by David and the unreal image perceived by Balaam point to a 'lively imaginative faculty' of the prophets involved.¹¹ In short: prophets were blessed with an unusually

⁷ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 101–102.

⁸ Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*.

⁹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 59.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

vivid imagination, including remarkable sensory abilities, for according to the *E* ‘imagination’, that is the first kind of knowledge, comprises ‘signs’ as well as sensory experience (*E*, II, 40schol.2). Prophets really ‘experienced’ things other people couldn’t. And this naturally led them ‘beyond the limits of intellect’: ‘many more ideas can be constructed from words and images than merely from the principles and axioms on which our entire natural knowledge is based’.¹² But Spinoza admits not to be able to explain how exactly this works: ‘As to the particular causes of nature involved, I confess my ignorance’.¹³

Erroll Harris put it succinctly:

The psychological explanation of the gift of prophecy we do not know, of the proximate causes of finite ideas we are often, in fact usually, ignorant, and to say simply that they issue from God’s nature, or are caused by his power, is true but not particularly enlightening, because it applies equally to all finite things. In short, the gift of prophecy is like the gift of poetry or music; not everybody possesses it and we cannot explain why some people have the special talent and others do not, but to describe it as a mode of revelation to the prophet of the nature and will of God does not conflict with Spinoza’s main doctrine.¹⁴

What it would take to fully comprehend the origins of prophecy seems clear, however: a very sophisticated theory of the causal mechanisms that rule our associative imagination—difficult but doable, or so it would seem. Let’s not forget that Spinoza’s propositions in the *E* on the imagination are designed to reveal the part imagination plays in the rise of knowledge: from what he writes about dreams, for instance in Letter 17, to Pieter Balling, it is quite clear that he was fascinated by the working of the imagination as such.¹⁵ Recall also that in the *E* Spinoza does give an example of the imaginative process described in the *TTP*: in daily life, ideas are constructed not on the principles and axioms of physics, but rather on the basis of words and images that we just happen to encounter randomly: when a Roman hears the word “pomum” he will form the idea of an apple. When a soldier sees the footprints of a horse, his thoughts will be directed to the horseman and to war, while a farmer will rather be inspired to reflect on a plough, and then a field, and so on. (*E*, II, 18schol.) In the *E*, this suggestion is not elaborated upon, but we could pause to

¹² *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴ Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, 219.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, 19–23.

think what would be required to formulate a Spinozist science of psychological association.

Perhaps one of Gilles Deleuze's favourite quotations from the *E* is helpful:

no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone (...) For no one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he could explain all its functions (*E*, III, 2schol.).¹⁶

For the body is where all perception and imagination originate: *E*, II, 14: 'The human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways.' In order to counter the objection that man cannot act, let alone 'create', without the interference of the mind, Spinoza considers the example of human artefacts, such as buildings and paintings 'and things of this kind' as products that give occasion to marvel at the complexity of human achievements, and prophetic accounts appear to be very similar. They result from a highly peculiar affectation of the human organism, and Spinoza adds that not only are we virtually ignorant of what a body can do, but the structure of the human body 'far surpasses anything made by human skill' (*E*, III, 2schol.)—no doubt on account of what could perhaps best be called its flexibility of response: both from the 'small physics' delivered in *E* II and from the opening propositions of *E* III an immensely complex picture emerges, for bodies are not only made up of complex parts themselves, they are also continuously changed by other bodies and changing other bodies in return.

As a consequence, the Hebrews of the Old Testament can hardly be blamed for being largely ignorant of the laws of nature according to which they responded to what occurred to them.¹⁷ But the fact remains that they were incapable of drawing rational conclusions from their random experiences, and thus their prophets continued to produce highly imaginative accounts of what they had been through, and occasionally this led to the issuing of decrees that just happened to be *wise*, especially when the prophets in question were virtuous, as was clearly the case with Moses, whose Law, Spinoza writes, 'displays God's mind, as it were'.¹⁸ But, Spinoza concludes, how it came to be that these strictly imaginative accounts were perceived both by the prophets themselves and by their audience

¹⁶ Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, 197 ff.

¹⁷ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 67.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69. See also 74–75 and 291, where Moses' 'divine virtue' is reaffirmed.

as *certain*, is beyond our ‘scientific knowledge’.¹⁹ All he can do is try and reconstruct what the Bible relates concerning the certainty of the prophets, which stands in need of further clarification, since this certainty is not caused by the imagination from which prophecy springs. This is why prophets were only *morally* certain of their prophecies.²⁰ No prophet, not even Moses, really understood his own prophecies, but this itself is perfectly intelligible in view of the nature of prophecy itself.²¹

The term ‘moral certainty’ was of course used widely before Spinoza, for instance by Descartes, but it acquires a meaning of its own in the *TTP*.²² The difference between mathematical and moral certainty corresponds to the difference between ideas that prove their own truth and those that need external confirmation. ‘He who has a true idea at the same time knows he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing’ (*E*, II, 43): ‘sic veritas norma sui, et falsi est.’ (*E*, II, 43schol.) Many ideas, however, are not, strictly speaking, adequate, and yet not untrue: their possible truth will have to appear from other sources—other true ideas, for example. A hint of what Spinoza may have had in mind is found in his analysis of what went on when God addressed the Israelites from Mount Sinai:

Although the voice which the Israelites heard could not have given those men a philosophical or mathematical certainty of God’s existence, it *sufficed* (my italics, WvB) to strike them with awe of God as they had previously known him, and to induce them to obedience, this being the purpose of that manifestation.²³

Consequently, the Israelites were *morally* certain of God’s existence, which in this context simply means that as a result of these events, they finally started living *as if they knew* of God’s existence. Whenever Spinoza uses the term ‘moral certainty’, all he is saying is that he has found empirical evidence from which moral improvement of those who were ‘certain’ can be deduced. To which he adds that ‘we have no grounds for expecting to reach greater certainty in this matter than did the prophets to whom it was originally revealed’.²⁴ This brings us to the second issue, Spinoza’s assessment of the origins of Scripture.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81–84.

²² Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*, Chapter 4.

²³ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 226.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 233. This interpretation of ‘moral certainty’ has been rejected by Verbeek, *Spinoza’s Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 75–81 on account of the argument that Spinoza’s theory of knowledge excludes the possibility of entertaining ‘probabilities’ concerning God.

3. *Origins of Scripture*

The ‘divine nature’ of Scripture is affirmed again and again,²⁵ although its divinity, Spinoza argues, should be understood metaphorically: ‘the revealed Word of God is not (...) a certain number of books, but (...) a simple conception of the divine mind revealed to the prophets, and that is—to obey God with all one’s heart by practicing justice and charity’.²⁶ The Bible, however, can only be called divine to the extent that it teaches true moral doctrine and true virtue. Establishing that this is indeed the case is such a difficult task precisely since we are dealing with Scripture, that is with written texts the meaning of which can easily be distorted by ‘our faculty of reason in so far as this is based on the principles of natural cognition’.²⁷ Indeed, Philosophy poses a real threat to our understanding of Scripture, for ‘historical narratives and revelation (...) cannot be deduced from principles known by the natural light’.²⁸

In interpreting Scripture, it is equally essential to take heed of the process of accommodation that pervades prophetic accounts in particular.²⁹ But Spinoza does not question the essential veracity of Scripture: ‘everything related in Scripture as having truly happened came to pass necessarily according to the laws of Nature, as everything does’.³⁰ And in his famous chapter on the interpretation of Scripture Spinoza is careful not to accommodate too many passages: if Moses, for instance, appears to have believed that God can be jealous, we should not make the mistake of explaining away the prophet’s beliefs.³¹ These beliefs are part of what today we would call the ‘context’ from which Scripture emerged. Spinoza is under no illusion: reconstructing the context from which the Bible arose in order to understand its meaning is an immensely difficult task:

Our historical study should set forth the circumstances relevant to all the extant books of the prophets, giving the life, character and pursuits of the author of every book, detailing who he was, on what occasion and at what time and for whom and in what language he wrote. Again it should relate

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 67–87. See also Chapter 3 and, for instance, 218. The exegetical principle of accommodation was discussed widely in the Dutch Republic. See, for instance, my *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 3 and Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans*, Part IV.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

what happened to each book, how it was first received, into whose hands it fell, how many variant versions there were, by whose decision it was received into the canon, and finally, how all the books, now universally regarded as sacred, were united into a single whole.³²

Quite apart from the huge, strictly linguistic complications involved,³³ a complete science of biblical scholarship would require the availability of many data now lost forever. At this point, Spinoza encounters a very real barrier: 'we either have no knowledge at all or but doubtful knowledge of the authors (...) of many of the books'.³⁴ In the Chapters 8 to 11 on the history of several biblical books Spinoza goes into considerable detail, highlighting the depths of our ignorance.

Still, Spinoza remains cheerful, as he is convinced that these factual barriers carry no consequences for his point of departure, for he concludes that 'this method demands no other light than the natural light of reason'³⁵ and what is more: this method neither leads to any other conclusion than that indeed the same basic doctrines are taught throughout Scripture, 'that God exists, one alone and omnipotent, who alone should be worshipped, who cares for all, who loves above all others those who worship him and love their neighbours as themselves'.³⁶ And these basic doctrines guarantee the divine or 'sacred' nature of Scripture.³⁷ For when do we call a thing sacred and divine? According to Spinoza 'when its purpose is to foster piety and religion, and it is sacred only for as long as men use it in a religious way'.³⁸ It seems significant that as soon as Spinoza starts to discuss 'true religion', most notably in Chapter 12, his attention shifts from the Old to the New Testament, and his conclusion leaves little room for doubt: 'from Scripture itself we learn that its message, unclouded by any doubt or ambiguity, is in essence this, to love God above all, and one's neighbour as one self'.³⁹ In short: even where the scholarly problems relating to the constitution of the sources involved appear to be insurmountable, they do not result in fundamental complications, threatening the contents of Spinoza's philosophy. On the contrary, the tension that

³² *Ibid.*, 144.

³³ *Ibid.*, 149–152.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁷ See Juffermans, *Drie perspectieven op religie*, Chapter 7.

³⁸ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 206.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 211. See also 215 and 220 ff.

has often been noticed between the *E* and the *TTP* may well have been overestimated, as we shall also see in the next sections.

4. *Salvation by Obedience*⁴⁰

As early as the Preface to the *TTP* Spinoza states to have ‘found nothing expressly taught in Scripture that was not in agreement with the intellect or that contradicted it’, immediately after which he also declares that ‘Scripture has nothing to do with philosophy’.⁴¹ But this does not necessarily lead to incoherence. You may find the comparison a bit mundane, but to my mind much the same could be said of a cookery book, containing recipes: it is no instance of chemistry but neither can it be said to contradict the basic truths of chemistry. Its contents just differ from a handbook on chemistry, but they do describe chemical processes.

Where Spinoza does acknowledge ‘irrational’ passages, such as those in which God is called jealous, they do not really pose a problem, since they can easily be shown to have been the result of the particular author’s views.⁴² Spinoza even concedes that there are a few ‘teachings of Scripture that are concerned only with philosophic matters’:

That there is a God or Being who made all things and who directs and sustains the world with supreme wisdom; that he takes the utmost care of men, that is, those of them who live moral and righteous lives; and that he severely punishes the others and cuts them off from the good.⁴³

In Chapter 13 he even admits that ‘I do not go so far as to maintain that nothing whatsoever of a purely philosophic nature is to be found in Scripture’s teaching’, although these affirmations are ‘very few’ and ‘of a very simple nature’. In short: ‘Scripture commands no other kind of knowledge than that which is necessary for all men before they can obey God according to his commandments, and without which men are bound to be self-willed, or at least unschooled to obedience’.⁴⁴ We have already seen what this knowledge amounts to, for again and again Spinoza claims that the Bible tells us unequivocally what we should do in order to serve

⁴⁰ See my ‘Spinoza en de waarheid van de godsdienst’. See also Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 236 ff.

⁴¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 230 ff.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 120. See Nadler, ‘Spinoza’s Theory of Divine Providence’.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

God: 'the entire Law consists in this alone, to love one's neighbour'.⁴⁵ This insight enables Spinoza to identify true faith as 'the holding of certain beliefs about God such that, without these beliefs, there cannot be obedience to God, and if this obedience is posited, these beliefs are necessarily posited'.⁴⁶ The *TTP* does not question the superiority of rational insight leading to salvation, but it includes the philosopher's efforts into the religious domain: 'he who is totally unacquainted with the Biblical narratives, but nevertheless holds salutary beliefs and pursues the true way of life, is absolutely blessed and has within him the spirit of Christ'.⁴⁷

The point I should like to stress is that the philosophical message of the Bible according to Spinoza is likewise strictly moral. It should not be sought in what French Spinoza scholarship has come to call '*le credo minimum*'—the seven articles of faith that Spinoza identifies as the '*necessaria*' for the individual believer. These should not be identified with the philosophical message of Scripture, precisely since they are articles of *faith*, and faith, Spinoza argues, 'demands piety rather than truth', while '(t)he aim of philosophy, is, quite simply, truth'.⁴⁸ And this means that the question concerning the ultimate agreement of the *TTP* and the *E* should be decided on the basis of a comparison between the *moral* views expounded in these books. If they can be demonstrated to be roughly similar, the remaining divergences between Spinoza's principal works will probably be incidental.

In Chapter 15 Spinoza clearly affirms that 'theology'—or to be more precise: 'revelation in so far as it manifests Scripture's objective as we have stated it, that is, the way of achieving obedience (...) or the Word of God properly so called'—'will be found to agree with reason'.⁴⁹ The fact that 'the power of reason (...) does not extend so far as to enable us to conclude that men can achieve blessedness simply through obedience without understanding' does not at all have to lead to the 'Straussian' conclusion that Spinoza had to accommodate his own views '*ad captum vulgi*'.⁵⁰ All he concedes here is his inability to demonstrate the truth of theology in the same way he delivered a scientific moral philosophy and

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 122. See also De Dijn, 'The Good and the True'.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 224–226. See Verbeek, *Spinoza's Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Chapters 1 and 4, where it is argued that Spinoza's 'credo' does not contain any philosophical proposition. See also Garber, 'Should Spinoza Have Published his Philosophy', 171–181.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 225. See Samely, *Spinoza's Theorie der Religion*, 58–66.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

his willingness to accept it nonetheless, on the basis of ‘moral certainty’ alone.⁵¹ In addition, he reaffirms his conviction that ‘the Word of God proclaimed by the prophets agrees in all respects with the Word of God that speaks in our hearts’.⁵²

Unless I am seriously mistaken, Spinoza had every right to claim basic agreement between his own *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata* and Scripture, or rather what he presents as the essence, the moral gist of Scripture, for his own moral philosophy is based on the notion that men live together because it is natural for them to do so. In direct opposition to Hobbes, Spinoza declares that the emergence of societies is a result of the state of nature rather than of any artificial ‘contract’ heralding a break with the natural state of affairs.⁵³ In the *E*, this insight first appears in II, 49schol., where Spinoza sketches some of the advantages implied by his denial of free will:

This doctrine contributes to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one, to mock no one, to envy no one, and also insofar as it teaches that each of us should be content with his own things, and should be helpful to his neighbour, not from unmanly compassion, partiality or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand. I shall show this in the Fourth Part.

And so he does, for in the fourth part of the *E* Spinoza develops a theory of the natural sociability of man which comes very close to a *factual* analysis of what Christ and Moses had revealed as the divine *command* to love one’s neighbour. Arguing from the insight that rational judgements are the result of what he calls ‘notiones communes’, notions that capture the most general aspects of things, that is those properties that things have in common (*E*, II, 37–40), Spinoza in Part Three first concludes that it is as natural as it is reasonable to recognise in our fellow men beings with whom we share a common predicament. Indeed, as Alexandre Matheron has famously demonstrated, in the heart of the *E* Spinoza delivers a brilliant theory of what *E*, III, 27schol. calls the ‘*affectuum imitatio*’—according to Spinoza, the way we respond emotionally to the external stimuli that affect us, is modelled on our perception of how other people react to what affects them, for ‘(I)f we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵³ Cf. Den Uyl, *Power, State and Freedom*; Balibar, *Spinoza et la politique*; Ueno, ‘Spinoza et le paradoxe du contrat social’.

had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect.' (*E*, III, 27)⁵⁴ This is not an attempt on Spinoza's part to smuggle in a normative moral perspective, for to feel 'with' others with whom we have so much more in common than we have with trees and clouds or other modes of substance, is in no way opposed to our natural urge for the perseverance of our being—'No one strives to preserve his being for the sake of anything else' (*E*, IV, 25). But because 'the more a thing agrees with our nature, the more useful or better it is for us (*E*, IV, 31cor.) and since 'insofar as men live according to the guide of reason, they must always agree amongst themselves' (*E*, IV, 35 dem.), clearly, '(T)here is no singular thing in Nature which is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason' (*E*, IV, 35cor.1). In short: 'man is a God to man' (*E*, IV, 35schol.). It is both natural and reasonable not only to care for others like ourselves, but also to wish them well in a very literal sense: 'The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men...' (*E*, IV, 37).

It is no coincidence, that Spinoza introduces the concepts of '*religio*' and '*pietas*' simultaneously, here in the heart of the *E*, in IV, 37schol., where he adds to 'relate to religion', 'whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, or insofar as we know God'.⁵⁵ 'Morality', he continues, is '(T)he desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason'.⁵⁶ Thus, religion and morality are included in an otherwise strictly factual analysis of man as a finite, albeit highly complex, modification of substance, striving as all modes do to persevere in its existence.

5. Conclusion: Christ

There are, moreover, at least two biblical figures who are presented as *some sort of philosophers*.⁵⁷ First, King Solomon is credited with having taught a number of essential *philosophical* lessons: only wisdom inspires true blessedness, and all wisdom, in particular 'the true principles of Ethics

⁵⁴ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 154 ff.

⁵⁵ See Juffermans, *Drie perspectieven op religie*, Chapter 6.

⁵⁶ Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 536: Curley translates '*pietas*' into 'morality', and I think he is right.

⁵⁷ In a sense, Paul is also presented as a philosopher: 111 and 215, although on 222–223 Spinoza makes sure to counter the Paulinian doctrine of 'justification by faith' by invoking John's emphasis on justification by works.

and Politics', flows from our knowledge of God.⁵⁸ And then there is Christ, of course, who had a mind 'whose excellence far surpasses the human mind' and who 'was the way of salvation'. According to Spinoza, the cause of this unique phenomenon was Christ's apparently superhuman mind: 'the wisdom of God—that is wisdom that is more than human—took on human nature in Christ'.⁵⁹ Indeed, according to Spinoza, 'Christ communed with God mind to mind'⁶⁰ and he 'was not so much the prophet as the mouthpiece of God'.⁶¹

Jonathan Israel has argued that these remarks should be read strategically:

The most plausible way to interpret Spinoza's emphasis on the special significance of Christ for all humankind is to see it as springing from a deeply felt need to form a tactical alliance, as a helpful device for promoting the kind of campaign he believed could potentially reform society and politics, and institute a true *libertas philosophandi*.⁶²

Spinoza was no Christian. On February 6, 1676 he wrote to Oldenburg on the death of Christ and his resurrection, arguing that while the former should be taken literally, the latter in his view was to be taken spiritually.⁶³ A few weeks earlier, he had told Oldenburg not to understand what it might mean that God had taken on human form in Christ.⁶⁴ Yet in the same letter he did refer to Christ as 'the eternal son of God, that is, God's eternal wisdom, which has manifested itself in all things and chiefly in the human mind, and most of all in Christ Jesus'.⁶⁵

Of course, Spinoza did not want to hurt Oldenburg's feelings, but according to the *TPP*, the spirit or mind of Christ is special on account of its immediate contact with God, which raises the question what could possibly have caused Christ to speak to God 'mente ad mentem', to have been a true philosopher? For this is what Spinoza claims: Christ's mind 'had to be adapted to the beliefs and doctrines held in common by all mankind, that

⁵⁸ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 110. See also 283.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 64. See also Note 3: 'Although some men possess gifts that nature does not bestow on others, they are not said to surpass human nature unless the gifts that are peculiar to them as such as cannot be understood from the definition of human nature.' (300)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶² Israel, 'Meyer, Koerbagh and the Radical Enlightenment Critique of Socinianism', 199.

⁶³ Spinoza, *Letters*, 338 (Letter 75).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 333 (Letter 73).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 333.

is, to those axioms that are universally true'.⁶⁶ Christ had no need of signs, words or images: 'Christ perceived truly, or understood, what was revealed (...) by pure thought'.⁶⁷ The fact that he accommodated himself by using parables and issuing laws only confirms his divine nature: 'in this matter he acted in God's place, adapting himself to the character of the people'.⁶⁸ But how, you may ask, can Spinoza have been sure of this?—should we, perhaps, conclude that Spinoza was *morally certain* of Christ possessing adequate knowledge?⁶⁹ I suppose we should, for according to Spinoza, Christ's teaching can be said to have *caused* a certain type of behaviour that in Spinoza's view does indeed meet the standards of a true 'religio'. An important clue is to be found in Chapter 5, on the Ceremonial Laws, in which Spinoza argues that Christ only taught 'universal moral precepts': 'It is for this reason that Christ promises a spiritual reward, not, like Moses, a material reward (...) His chief concern was to teach moral doctrines'.⁷⁰ Even if we are unsure about the chain of causal events leading up to, say, the Sermon of the Mountain, the effects of this particular causal nexus reveal the adequacy of Christ's moral message. According to Spinoza: 'to those to whom it was granted to know the mysteries of Heaven, his [i.e. Christ's, WvB] teaching took the form of eternal truths, not of prescribed laws. In this way he freed them from bondage to the law, while nevertheless giving further strength and stability to the law'.⁷¹

Perhaps, the portrait Spinoza paints of Christ as a philosopher is comparable to his assessment of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds by Moses: an odd event to say the least, but Spinoza sees no reason to question its occurrence and as far as the latter event is concerned, *Exodus* even provides us with a clue as to its empirical reality, describing 'an east wind which blew strongly all night long'.⁷² So as long as Christ can be demonstrated to have taught universal moral truths, he must have been a genuine philosopher. As early as the Preface of the *TTP*, Spinoza calls the Christian religion—of which, sadly, 'nothing is left but the outside form'—a religion 'of love, joy,

⁶⁶ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 107.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁹ See for instance De Dijn, 'Spinoza and Revealed Religion' and Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 248.

⁷⁰ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 113–114.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 133.

peace, temperance and honest dealing with all men'.⁷³ Its universality and its relation to the Old Testament are clear:

Before the coming of Christ the prophets used to proclaim religion as the law of their own country by virtue of the covenant made in the time of Moses, whereas after the coming of Christ the Apostles preached religion to all men as a universal law solely by virtue of Christ's Passion.⁷⁴

The specific rational element added by Christ to the Law consisted precisely in the universality of the Gospel. In his analysis of the destruction of the Hebrew State, Spinoza reiterates that after this event people had to wait for the universal religion, which had not yet been revealed to them.⁷⁵

Richard Mason, meanwhile, was perfectly right to argue that Spinoza's comments on Christ are too fragmentary to reconstruct a genuinely 'Spinozist' Christology.⁷⁶ In particular the question how it could be that Christ was the *only* human being able to communicate directly with God remains difficult: was he, perhaps, 'chosen'? And what kind of knowledge of God did he possess? According to Matheron this must have been knowledge 'of the third kind', that is 'a kind of knowing [which] proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.' (*E*, II, 40schol.2), but even Matheron backs down from specifying what Christ's knowledge must have amounted to. While it seems clear which purpose Christ served—'de faire émerger de l'Histoire ce qui, dans l'Histoire, dépasse l'Histoire'⁷⁷—it remains a mystery how Christ was able to rise to the occasion. For what are we to make of an adequate insight into the *individual* essences of *all* human beings? What kind of human being can have had this kind of knowledge? Isn't it even curious to present Christ as philosopher, on account of his ability to communicate directly with God, for according to the *TTP* 'philosophy rests on the basis of universally valid axioms, and must be constructed by Nature alone'?⁷⁸

We have seen that in the *TTP*, dealing with prophecy, Scripture, salvation, and Christ, Spinoza reaches the limits of what can be explained rationally.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁷⁶ Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, Chapter 9.

⁷⁷ Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*, 8.

⁷⁸ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 226. See Donagan, 'Spinoza's Theology', 368–372.

What do these ‘limits’ have in common? The infinite complexity of *natura naturata* is in itself perfectly intelligible. Indeed, this message is reiterated in the *TTP* itself, in Chapter 6, On Miracles: ‘For since the virtue and power of Nature is the very virtue and power of God, and the laws and rules of nature are God’s very decrees, there can be no doubt that Nature’s power is infinite’.⁷⁹ But in the *E* Spinoza is pretty straightforward about the consequences of living in an infinite universe, for the fact that we as finite modes exist ‘in duration’ implies that we will always and inevitably remain largely ignorant both of the duration of our own body and of the singular things that exist outside us (*E*, II, 30–31): the existence of all finite modes of the attribute of Extension is the product of an infinite chain of finite causes, from which Spinoza draws the conclusion ‘that all particular things are contingent and corruptible’ (*E*, II, 31cor.) in the sense that no finite intellect will ever be able to grasp the entire natural order from which finite modes result (*E*, I, 33schol.1). Hence, his announcement in the fourth chapter of the *TTP*, according to which ‘we plainly have no knowledge as to the actual co-ordination and interconnection of things (...) So that for practical purposes it is better, indeed, it is essential to consider things as contingent’.⁸⁰

The prophetic accounts, origins of Scripture and the life of Christ—in brief: the essential ingredients that the religious truths of the Bible are made of—are all matters of *historical enquiry* challenging us to make sense of unique events about which we just happen to be poorly informed. Seen in this light, the need for a ‘true religion’ is not so much the consequence of man’s inability to master ‘true philosophy’ but rather of the inescapable fact, itself deduced from that same philosophy, that no finite mind will ever be able to become more than part of the infinite substance. But since Scripture, according to Spinoza, holds enough clues for reaching moral certainty concerning the salutary nature of its message, it is not unreasonable to subscribe to Christianity, even if the figure of Christ remains a mystery: ‘Could we live our lives wisely if we were to accept as true nothing that could conceivably be called into doubt on any principle of scepticism? Are not most of our actions in any case fraught with uncertainty and hazard?’⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

CHAPTER EIGHT

VONDEL'S NOAH ON GOD AND NATURE

Noah, of Ondergang der Eerste Weerelt (Noah or Downfall of the First World) is the last play Vondel wrote and he never saw it performed. Although it was published in 1667, it was probably written in 1665, when Vondel was turning 78 and had 14 more years to live.¹ It really was the product of a Golden Age: in 1665 Vermeer painted the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Anthonie van Leeuwenhoek built his first microscope, and Spinoza started writing the *TTP*. These were indeed exciting times: the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* started appearing, Newton carried out his first optical experiments, after Cambridge University was temporarily closed on account of the plague, and Britain entered war with the Dutch Republic. In Paris, the first issue of the *Journal des Scavans* appeared, while Racine published his *Alexandre le Grand* and Molière his *L'amour médecin*.

In view of the theological importance of the Flood and the astounding facts involved, the story of Noah had surprisingly little impact on the literary tradition of the Netherlands. While the Ark was depicted repeatedly in a wide variety throughout Christendom from the first centuries onwards, Noah's story appears to have failed to inspire authors in the way Adam's had, let alone Moses'.² From St. Augustine onwards the story of the Flood and in particular the reconstruction of the logistics involved in shipping all the animals which according to Genesis were saved had vexed a host of biblical scholars attempting to hold on to a literal interpretation of Noah's achievements. The limited lack of interest in the literary potential offered by the Flood also stands in stark contrast to early modern genealogical

¹ I use the edition made by B.H. Molkenboer in Vondel, *Werken*, X, 391–454. Act One, vss 43–44: 'The sixteen centuries and another fifty-six years / Have since then, feel free to boast, not passed fruitlessly.' ('De zestien eeuwen en noch zesenvijftigh jaeren / Zijn sedert, roemt vry, niet onvruchtbaer heengevaeren.') I owe all translations of Vondel's Dutch to Michiel Wielema, without whom this chapter could not have been published in English.

² Fink, *Noe der Gerechte in der frühchristlichen Kunst*. For some early theological and scholarly assessments, see Garcia Martinez and Luttkhuizen, *Interpretations of the Flood*. In Allen, *The Legend of Noah*, 151–153, Vondel is the only Dutch literary author (briefly) mentioned.

efforts to establish the holy lineage of the royal dynasties ruling Europe, that were all supposed to have descended from Aeneas and/or Noah.³ A rare precursor to Vondel's play appears to have been staged by Karel van Mander, who in the early 1570s produced a *Noah*, the text of which, however, is lost.⁴ Vondel's *Noah* does not seem to have inspired fellow Dutchmen to follow his lead either: the only major Dutch author who also turned to Noah was Willem Bilderdijk, who in 1820 published his own (uncompleted) *Ondergang der eerste wareld*.⁵

By the middle of the seventeenth century, wayward scholars such as Isaac La Peyrière and Isaac Vossius had started questioning the universality of the Flood as well as the chronological accuracy of the biblical account supplied in Genesis.⁶ Vondel, however, clearly did not want to be associated in any way with the harmful implications held by such scholarship regarding the infallibility of Scripture. An obvious clue to Vondel's personal assessment of the relevance of Noah is to be found in its Dedication, in which the playwright declares it to be the final part of a trilogy: following *Lucifer* (1654) and *Adam in ballingschap* (1664), *Noah*, or so Vondel claims, completes the biblical account of the birth of evil and the outcome of its first encounter with man, or to put it differently, man's original response to the challenges put to him by the lure of evil, only to be overcome by the making of a covenant, restoring God's confidence in man.⁷

1. *Noah or the Downfall of the First World*

The first Act is set somewhere in the Caucasus, at the gates of 'Reuzenburg', a castle inhabited by giants, the offspring of the upright sons of Seth and the mischievous daughters of Cain. These giants commit adultery on a gargantuan scale and revel in the practice of all sorts of other vicious crimes. In front of the castle we meet the antediluvian patriarch Noah, who is deeply concerned over the licentiousness of his contemporaries, and who is busy building a huge ship. Water is rising.

³ Tanner, *The Last Descendants of Aeneas*.

⁴ Langvik-Johannessen, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*, 261.

⁵ Bilderdijk, *Ondergang der eerste wareld*.

⁶ Allen, *The Legend of Noah*, Chapters 4, 5 and 7.

⁷ Vondel's sources are clear: besides on Genesis, he relies mainly on Salianus, *Annales Ecclesiastici Veteris Testamenti*. The plays have been presented as a trilogy in the edition by Schenkeveld-van der Dussen: Vondel, *Lucifer*.

The next Act introduces Achiman, 'ruler of the East', who is preparing his royal wedding to Urania and who is told by Noah's 'Bouwmeester' (Architect) that he'd better prepare for a swim. The Architect also informs Achiman of Noah's precise plans and of his holy walk of life: he will ship his own family and had already stored couples of all known animals. Soon, he will sail away while the rest of the world will drown. Although his son Ham finds it difficult to obey his father, Noah's righteousness has kept his family intact. For a moment even Achiman seems impressed, upon which Noah appears, delivering his final warning: he is now 500 years old and for the last century he has been predicting that the end was near and all this time he has been working on his ship. During the next few years water will flood the earth and darkness will fall, he prophesies, because the offspring of Seth and Cain was doomed and is only interested in sensual pleasures and material gain, and because it only obeys to the sword.

In the third Act Achiman is forced to swallow his original libertine response to Noah's epiphany: as the water keeps rising and the first reports on drowning cattle have reached him, he starts to recognise that Noah was, perhaps, right after all and he abandons the festivities at the Reuzenburgh. This leads to a violent reaction from Achiman's wife to be, Urania. She is furious and forces Achiman to swallow his hesitations. Suddenly Noah enters the scene and a dialogue enfolds between Noah and Urania on the subject of women. Wasn't Noah born from a woman, doesn't he have a wife and daughters in law of himself? Urania boldly reminds Noah of his own father who was anything but prude himself, but Noah retorts by declaring that he is committed to cleanse his family name.

At the opening of the fourth Act we meet Noah's son Ham, who apparently has just been at the party and has spoken to Urania, and meets up with his father. Now that the Flood is about to wash away all living things, Ham questions the moral grounds on which God could possibly have decided to punish mankind in the way that he is clearly about to. If you are right, Ham wonders, doesn't that turn God into a vengeful judge? His father tries to explain: first, Noah argues, we are simply unable to judge God's ways and second, man has bought misery over himself. Once Noah and his family have embarked, the Ark proves its mettle and Noah turns his attention to Shem, continuing his argument that God cannot be blamed for the Flood: man is endowed with a free will, and has no one to blame but himself.

The fifth and final Act brings us back to the court of Achiman. Lightning strikes, a giant flood is about to swallow the Reuzenburgh, and the archangel Uriel appears: Urania begs for mercy, and while it is certain that the

entire court of Achiman will drown, the final words of Uriel proclaim that those who persevere in their repentance and are sincere in their remorse, will be saved and will receive God's grace after all. The chorus explains: they will have to wait until the coming of Christ, whose grace will allow them to leave purgatory for good.

2. Theologians and Philosophers on the Origins of Evil

Vondel was no theologian and no philosopher either, but as a playwright and a poet he did not back down from addressing major theological and philosophical issues. Arguably the most contested problem in seventeenth-century theology and moral philosophy concerned the nature of evil, or to be more precise, the assessment of man's part in what theologians used to refer to as 'sin'. By far the most important intellectual quarrel that was fought in the Dutch Republic during Vondel's lifetime was, of course, the dispute between Arminians or Remonstrants and Gomarists or Counter-Remonstrants. As will be only too familiar, the question of the responsibility for what is wrong with God's creation was at the heart of what started as an academic dispute between two Leiden professors of theology, but soon spilled over to the public domain, bringing the Republic to the brink of civil war.⁸

A former Remonstrant himself, Vondel's stance toward this famous episode in Dutch church history is clear enough: he completely rejected the 'orthodox' Calvinism triumphant at the Synod of Dordrecht, according to which a correct understanding of God's sovereign grace left man utterly impotent.⁹ According to 'Dordt', after the Fall man is sinful by nature and God's decision as to who will be saved cannot in any way be affected by the efforts of man. Any attempt, or so Counter-Remonstrants argued, to bring man's own achievements into the equation will inevitably harm the core of Reformed theology and lead to 'popish' speculations regarding a free will. While the 'precise' wing of the Dutch Reformed church put all its cards on securing the sovereign nature of divine Grace, following from an essentially omnipotent God, their Remonstrant opponents continued to insist on the necessity to account for the origins as well as the reality of

⁸ See most recently Goudriaan and Van Lieburg (eds.), *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt*.

⁹ See Brom, *Vondels geloof*, esp. Chapter 3; Molkenboer, *De jonge Vondel*; Calis, *Vondel*, Chapters 5 and 6.

evil, that in view of God's essential benevolence could only be attributed to man.¹⁰

By the time Vondel wrote *Noah*, he had been a devout Roman-Catholic for at least a quarter of a century and according to Catholic doctrine, and to the Jesuit point of view in particular, man is free to accept Grace or not, and good deeds—the possibility of which is subject to Grace itself—must be performed by the individual because he wants to. Salvation, therefore, is always possible, but has to be earned. It should be added, though, that in the heart of French Catholicism Jansenism would raise the same issue that was at stake in Dordt, for the Flemish priest Cornelius Jansenius had come close to Calvinism in stressing that after the Fall man is no longer capable of doing any goods deeds and grace cannot be earned.¹¹ Although Jansenism made a considerable impact on Dutch Catholics, Vondel would have none of it.¹²

From a philosophical point of view, the question that split the Dutch Reformed Church during the 1610s and troubled French Catholicism until well into the eighteenth century revealed the difficulty of conceiving a Perfect Being that is omnipotent as it is benevolent. At the same time Vondel sat down to complete his trilogy on the origins of human evil and its relationship to divine Grace, Spinoza, the greatest Dutch philosopher ever, was discussing the same subject in a remarkable correspondence with Willem van Blijenbergh, a grain merchant from Dordrecht, as becomes evident from Letters 18 to 24 in Spinoza's correspondence.¹³ In assessing this episode in Spinoza's intellectual biography, it should be borne in mind that except for a small circle of friends the reading public could only become aware of his philosophical intentions in 1670. Prior to the (anonymous) publication of the *TPP*, only Spinoza's debut was available, and since these *Principia Philosophiae Cartesianaæ* (Principles of Cartesian Philosophy, 1663) were supposed to serve as a general introduction to the metaphysics and the natural philosophy of Descartes, the

¹⁰ In the decades following Dordt the Remonstrant tradition would be upheld most convincingly by Vondel's personal friend Hugo Grotius to whom he dedicated the *Gijsbreght van Amstel* and by Simon Episcopius, to whom Vondel dedicated an epitaph: Vondel, *Werken*, V, 242.

¹¹ Abercrombie, *The Origins of Jansenism*; Sedgwick, *Jansenism in Seventeenth-Century France*.

¹² Brom, *Vondels geloof*, 324 ff.; Spiertz, 'Jansenisme in en rond de Nederlanden'; Roegiers, 'Jansenisme en katholieke hervorming in de Nederlanden'.

¹³ Spinoza, *Letters*, 128–172 (Letters 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24). See Deleuze, *Spinoza*, Chapter 3. On Van Blijenbergh, see my entry in Van Bunge a.o. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*.

wider public had to read between the lines in order to reconstruct the general thrust of a budding ‘Spinozism’.¹⁴ To his credit, Van Blijenbergh, a staunch Calvinist, had come across several passages that alerted him and had made him curious to find out more, so he addressed Spinoza on 12 December 1664, wondering how he felt about the freedom of the will and its part in the origins of evil. In his first reply, Spinoza summarises the issue as follows:

it seems clearly to follow, both from God's providence, which is identical with his will, and from God's concurrence and the continuous creation of things, either that there is no such thing as sin or evil, or that God brings about that sin and that evil.¹⁵

While Spinoza is plainly very careful in this encounter with a perfect stranger from Dordrecht, he is adamant that in reality there is no such thing as ‘evil’ or ‘sin’, neither for that matter in Adam’s behaviour:

Neither can we say that Adam's will was at variance with God's law, and was evil because it was displeasing to God. It would argue great imperfection to God if anything happened against his will, or if he wanted something he could not possess, or if his nature were determined in such a manner that, just like his creatures, he felt sympathy with some things and antipathy to others.¹⁶

In the next letter, Spinoza tries to explain to Van Blijenbergh that there is nothing ‘positive’ about evil, since it has no reality of its own, and is merely ‘a mode of thinking’ (*ens rationis*), construed by man, ‘comparing things with one another’.¹⁷ By this time, Spinoza must have felt that his philosophy, according to which ‘that which constitutes the specific reality of evil, error and villainy does not consist in anything that expresses essence’,¹⁸ could not possibly convince Van Blijenbergh, so he politely made an end to the correspondence. Of course, Spinoza’s extremely rationalist ‘solution’ was only one of many attempts to account for the essence of evil launched by seventeenth-century philosophers, of which Leibniz’s *Theodicée* (1710) would become the most famous example on account of

¹⁴ Officially, Spinoza’s debut was entitled *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I, et II, More Geometrico demonstratae. Accesserunt Ejusdem Cogitata Metaphysica generali, quam speciali occurrunt, quaestiones breviter explicantur* (Amsterdam, 1663). A Dutch translation appeared in 1664.

¹⁵ Spinoza, *Letters*, 132 (Letter 19).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 133–134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

its notoriously counterintuitive conclusion that we actually live in 'the best of all possible worlds'.¹⁹ In view of the great effort invested by contemporary theologians and philosophers, what, we might ask, did Vondel contribute to the ongoing debate concerning the nature of evil?

3. Noah: *God and Nature*

W.A.P. Smit was the first expert to draw attention to the merits of the remarkable fourth Act of *Noah*, that according to earlier critics was a failure in that it slowed down the pace of the play.²⁰ Smit readily admitted that it does, but the reason for this, he argued, was a good one: by showing the effect Urania has on Ham, Noah's world becomes a far more dynamic one than might be expected from the dominant principle of the duality or dichotomy between Urania's domain and Noah's. The fourth Act keeps the tension intact, Smit argued, but the conflict between the two acquires new depth once Urania proves to be able to strike at the heart of Noah's family, that is just about to embark, that is to close the doors of the Ark. What is more, once Urania is told that in the end she is not lost forever either if her repentance is sincere, even a common future comes in sight.

Frans-Willem Korsten had pursued this observation as part of a highly ambitious interpretation of Vondel's entire legacy, according to which the latter's plays contain a sustained analysis of the sovereignty of *potentia* embodied in the desire to realise autonomy.²¹ Korsten too finds an entrance into *Noah* by focussing on Ham's questioning of God's impending punishment. As we have seen in the fourth Act, Ham is complaining about the injustice of God's punishment: what did we do to deserve the complete destruction of the world? Doesn't God himself show signs of 'female' fickleness by reacting in this way? Korsten, however, draws our attention to Noah's reply, in which it is revealed to Ham that Urania has even attempted to cause a rift in his own family, by separating brothers and daughters in law from each other, and even father from mother: no other conclusion seems warranted than that Noah himself has come under the spell of Urania.

¹⁹ Nadler, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*, Chapter 4.

²⁰ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, III, 554–560.

²¹ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, Chapter 2.

Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen has observed that Vondel repeatedly refers to events following the Flood, and more in particular to the famous passage in Genesis 9:18–26 in which Noah will be found naked and drunk after he tasted the wine he made from the grapes planted once the Ark has touched land again. Korsten has further explored the ambiguities simmering beneath the surface of Noah's encounter with Urania.²² To begin with, Noah's future behaviour clearly demonstrates that God failed to cleanse the world: even his most loyal servant succumbs to temptation at the first occasion that presents itself once the Ark has reached dry land. Is God in the last resort unable to control Nature?

Consider the remarkable opening speech of the play, delivered by Apollion, who is supposed to represent Evil: it pictures the world after the Fall—a world in which all of nature enjoys a wide variety of the most lurid pleasures. Clearly, this situation was far from perfect, yet Genesis 6:5 carries little information on the matter: men have become evil, but what exactly does this evil amount to? According to *Noah*, prediluvian man was living lawlessly (vss 389–400) and in sexual anarchy (vss 431–506). It should be added, though, that Vondel appears to depict this sorry state of affairs with considerable relish:

Here sensual desire finds everything that human lust yearns for,
Beautiful gardens, meadows, brooks and springs all around.
Fruits drop from the branches right into your mouth
And melt on your tongue. Birds warble.
Dancing, playing, endless feasting
And wedding celebrations are the custom here throughout the year.
Men's souls are not constrained by laws or subject to coercion. (vss 68–74)²³

What is more, the real chaos pictured in *Noah* results from God's decision to make an end to this lawless life of pleasure, this abundance of *potentia*, and it is only natural that the violence with which God will destroy the First World provokes indignation with Noah's sons Hham, Shem and Japheth (vss 1032–1054; 1289–1301; 1505–1534): by what right does God decide to end the existing order of nature? Consider also Achiman's remarkable eloquence, where he points out how natural it is for a man to seek the company of beautiful women:

²² Vondel, *Lucifer*, 318–319.

²³ Hier vint de snoeplust al wat 's menschen lust loopt zoeken, / Lusthoven, beemden, beek en bronnen in het ront. / De vruchten druppen van de takken in den mont, / En smilten op de tong. de vogels quinkeleeren. Het danssen, speelen, het gedurigh banketteeren, / En bruiloften gaet hier het gansche jaer in zwang. / Men bint de zielen aen geen wetten, en bedwang. (vss 68–74)

Freed of discipline and severe constraints, we find joy
 In passing the time that is now fully ours to dispose of.
 It pleases us to exercise these limbs, now full of youth and health,
 And not, tortured by rigid shackles, with a melancholy mind
 And our heads hanging low, to lament, to weep.
 Pour out wine. Bring balsam. Rejoice. This is our moment.
 Make garlands of roses. Put a bride on each knee
 Before our time runs out and death closes the door.
 If father likes, let him play the tune to which we dance.
 A youthful heart should miss neither feast nor a chance to wed. (vss 493–
 502)²⁴

By the same token, there's something undeniably splendid about Urania's reaction to the first account of impending doom:

If due to this teaching men start to live woman-less
 Then for sure things have gone far enough.
 There is no need to drown the world in a flood of water:
 For it cannot persist without women. (vss 766–770)²⁵

And then, there's Urania's violent reaction to Achiman's refusal, in Act Three, to pursue the wedding. Indeed, her indignation is perfectly natural and seems even justified: what nonsense to keep women responsible for what might be wrong with the world if men and women enjoyed themselves together, and what is more: is Achiman really about to break his promise to her?

We reclined, our mouths touching, our arms locked in embrace,
 Two souls fused and merged into one.
 How did you not swear that you would rather see the sun
 Robbed of its light than love's flame quenched in your bosom. (vss 875–
 879)²⁶

²⁴ Het luste ons 's levens tijt, nu tjdigh en voorhanden, / Te bezigen, ontboeit van tucht
 en strenge banden. / Het luste ons deze le n, nu jeughdigh en gezont, / Te bezigen, en niet,
 geprangt door naeu verbont, / Zwaermoedigh, hangends hoofts, te jammeren, te treuren. /
 Schenkt wijn. brengt balssem. juicht. het magh ons nu gebeuren. Vlecht roozekranssen. zet
 op elke knie een bruit, / Eer 's levens tijt verloop', de doot den draeiboom sluit'. Belieft het
 vader, hy magh speelen, daer wy danssen. / Een jeugdigh hart verzuim' noch feest noch
 bruiloftskanssen. (vss 493–502)

²⁵ Begint het mansdom door dees leerling vrouweloes / Te leven, zeker 't is dan ver
 genoegh gekomen. Men hoeft de weerelt in geen zee en waterstroomen/ Te smooren: want
 zy kan niet vrouweloes bestaan. (vss 766–770)

²⁶ Wy hingen, mont aen mont, en arm in arm gestrengelt, / Twee zielen beide in een
 gesmolten en gemengelt.

But there is more to come, for Urania's ensuing cross examination of Noah is surely one of the highlights of the entire play, delivering a perfectly self confident declaration of independence:

And is this foolishness going to continue? Old man,
 You are fretting yourself to death. What have you gained
 All your life other than strife, nothing of value!
 How can you think so badly of women?
 A woman has borne you, her love in childbearing obliges you
 To be faithful: and your sons, devoted to women,
 Rather behold her face than the most beautiful thing,
 That is the face of the all-warming sun,
 The joy of the living and source of every light:
 Or has old age withered away your desire for women,
 Then your senility and not any woman is to blame. (vss 962–973)²⁷

And listen to the song Urania and her friends sing when they return to the wedding party, celebrating the swan, a noble symbol of love, a beautiful animal *that cannot drown*. It would seem, then, that these women refuse to be intimidated by Noah's bleak message of repentance:

If all things sunk and perished
 Where would the swan be?
 Where would the swan be,
 The swan, that joyful water creature,
 Never tired of kissing?
 No waters put out
 Her burning passion.
 She likes to nest midstream.
 She nurtures passion,
 She nurtures passion
 With her merry mate,
 And sits on her eggs,
 And neither cares for weepers,

Wat zweertge niet! de zon van straelen eer berooft / Te zien dan 't minnevier in uwe
 borst gedooft. (vss 875–879)

²⁷ En blijft dees suffery noch duuren? oude knecht, / Gy soft u selven doot. wat hebtge
 toch gewonnen Uw leven lang, als twist gerokkent, niet gesponnen! / Hoe staen de vrou-
 wen u zoo byster in het licht? Een vrou heeft u gebaert, haer liefde uw trou verplicht /
 Door kinderbaeren: en uw zoons, verknocht aen vrouwen, / Haer aenschijn liever dan het
 allerschoonste aenschouwen, / Dat is het aenschijn van d'alkoesterende zon, / Der leven-
 digen vreugt, en aller lichten bron: / Of is door ouderdom uw vrouwezucht gesleeten, /
 Dat werde uw' ouderdom, en geene vrou geweeten. (vss 962–973)

Nor fears any harm.
 Her flying young swim along,
 Over river and sea,
 Over river and sea.
 She lives in the element full of motion,
 And cleans her feathers,
 And glides with striding gait
 Till the end of her life.
 Dying she sings a merry song
 Among the reeds,
 Among the reeds.
 She defies spiteful death out of lust for life,
 With her song
 And triumphant air,
 And dies calmly.
 Dying, her fading eyes
 Seek again the light,
 Seek again the light,
 The dowry, nature's loan
 Given to each,
 To live in joy.
 Thus she departs. (vss 1059–1093)²⁸

Surely this passage, packed with melancholy, reveals a wisdom of its own, which reaches well beyond the blind pursuit of physical pleasure. If Urania and her companions are to be deemed 'hedonists', there's an undeniable dignity in the way they face their end. Ham's anger, as expressed in the fourth Act, is just as well put, and even manages to make fun of God's motives: has He turned into a woman?

You do not install a father but an executioner,
 Who counts every fault, scrupulously weighs each crime,
 And threatens people's lives with a bare sword.
 You portray the deity as a wild bear.

²⁸ Zou het al zinken en vergaan, / Waer bleef de zwaen? / Waer bleef de zwaen, / De zwaen, dat vrolijke waterdier, / Noit zat van kussen? / Geen watren blussen / Haer minnevier. / 't Lust haer te nestlen op den vloet. Zy queekt den gloet, / Zy queekt den gloet / Met haere vrolijke wederga, / En kipt haere eiers, / En acht geen schreiers, / Noch vreest geen scha. / Vliegende jongen zwemmen me, / Door stroom en zee, / Door stroom en zee. / Zy groeit in 't levendigh element, / En wast de veêren, / En vaert spansseeren / Tot 's levens endt. / Stervende zingtze een vrolijk liet / In 't suikerriet, / In 't suikerriet. / Zy tart de nijdige doot uit lust, / Met quinkeleeren, / En triomfeeren, / En sterft gerust. / Stervende zoekt haer flaeu gezicht / Noch eens het licht, / Noch eens het licht, / Den bruitschat, van de natuur te leen / Aen elk gegeven, / Om bly te leven. / Zoo vaertze heen. (vss 1059–1093)

A bear, a wild boar uproots some bushes,
 A tyrant an empire, the divinity all empires,
 Nay the whole world. Who ever saw greater injustice!
 Such an accumulation of waters and clouds,
 Gradually and powerfully building up in the air,
 When it bursts nations and mountains together will drown,
 And we shall hear the world expire in one last gasp.
 Does God become angry and infuriated, like a woman?
 Is God's providence affected by remorse?
 That's not providence but a disorder, inconstant,
 And fickle. Have mercy on yourself first. (vss 1211–1225)²⁹

Noah's response to Urania's proud defiance and to Ham's probing questions seems feeble. In reply to his sons, Noah claims that God *could* have forgiven man before the Flood, but that God's essence is incomprehensible. All we can do is guess:

I know, God be praised, that we lack the powers
 To speak without stammering about God's nature,
 Something incomprehensible, subject to no alteration.
 One must grasp God's attributes by way of human speech. (vss 1232–1235)³⁰

God's revenge, however, is justified since man has sinned out of free will (vs 1355) and because God's sovereignty, that is his *potestas*, enables him to take revenge:

When lately heaven's judge sternly opened court,
 Where God's justice and God's mercy pleaded their cause,
 His offended majesties could not be reconciled:
 They stood in each other's light.
 No verdict was spoken as long as the scales were balanced.
 Finally anger proved weightier.
 The curse prevailed after blessing's downfall,

²⁹ Gy zet geen' vader, maer scherprechter op den troon, / Die elke struikling telt, de misdaet naeu wil weegen, / En dreigen 's menschen hals met eenen bloeten deegen. / Gy beelt de godtheit uit, gelijk een' wilden beer. / Een beer, een everzwijn rukt een bos-schaedje neér, / De dwingelant een rijk; de godtheit alle rijken, / Ja al de weerelt, wiezag grooter ongelijken! / Zoo veele wateren en wolken aengezakt, / En aen de lucht allengs met kracht op een gepakt, / Aen 't scheuren, zullen volk en bergen teffens smooren, / Wy 's weerelts jongsten snik, in eenen dootsnik hooren. / Wort Godt verbolgen en oploopende, als een vrou? / Wort Godts voorzienigheit geraekt van nabero? / Dat 's geen voorzienigheit, maer krankheit, ongestadigh, / En wispeeltuur, ay zijt u zelven eerst genadigh. (vss 1211–1225)

³⁰ Ik weete, Godt zy lof, dat krachten ons ontbreken / Om zonder stameren van Gods natuur te spreken, / Een onbegrijpzaemheit, geen steurnis onderdaen. / Men moet door 's menschen spraek Godts eigenschap verstaen. (vss 1232–1235)

And humankind, seeking in vain to extenuate its atrocities,
Was harshly punished and sent to its doom. (vss 1367–1375)³¹

Apparently, this suffices to convince Noah's sons to embark: God is capable of destroying nature, and therefore he is entitled to do so.

As a consequence, we are left with a view of human history that is marked by the continuing movement between two opposing forces of Nature and Grace, that, however, do not exclude each other, for while nature does not appear to be evil by itself, God's benevolence is not obvious either. In the end, God's *potestas* overrules nature's *potentia*. And while nature will not be overcome by God's decision to cleanse Noah's world from 'sin', God's interference with the natural order of things does not end with the Flood, that will only turn out to be first step toward the coming of Christ, at which occasion even *Urania* will be saved. Let's see how far a more thorough exploration of the ambiguities contained in this conclusion may bring us, for it just so happens that Vondel's mature meditations on the dialectics of Nature and Grace originated at the dawn of the Radical Enlightenment. In 1665, when Spinoza started writing the *TTP* (and was trying to escape from Van Blijenbergh's prying eyes), half of his *E* had been completed.

4. Vondel versus the Radical Enlightenment

Vondel was definitively no spinozist. As Fokke Akkerman put it: 'One might ask whether a concept of tragedy is at all conceivable in the rigid deterministic system of Spinoza. He does not acknowledge a personal God as the ultimate foundation of morality, he does not believe in fate or chance. Everything that is or happens results from causes with inevitable necessity.'³² On the other hand, Vondel's thought is in no way 'part of' the Radical Enlightenment, but in a play such as *Noah*, Korsten argues, Vondel 'thinks by acting', for literature is always part of a universe in which words, ideas and concepts constantly evolve and acquire meaning

³¹ Toen 's hemels rechter streng ter jongste vierschaer ging, / Daer Godts rechtvaerdigheit en Godts genade pleitten, / Kon geen verzoening by gequetste majesteiten / Verworven worden. d'een stont d'andere in het licht. / De tong der weeghschael zweegh, zoo langze in tegenwight / Bleef twijnen. entlijk quam de boosheit t'overweegen. / De vloek stont boven, na het zwichten van den zegen, / En 't menschdom, dat vergeefs zijn gruwelen verbloemt, / Wert door het vonnis streng der straffe toegedoemt. (vss 1367–75)

³² Akkerman, 'A Spinozistic Perspective', 174.

in the continuing interaction between the text, its surroundings, and its readers.³³ As soon as Vondel turns to the language of theology and philosophy, he rejects the Radical Enlightenment emphatically, as is evident from his *Bespiegelingen van Godt en Godsdienst* (Thoughts on God and Religion), a long five-part poem, packed with arguments against the 'on-godisten' and first published in 1662. It was probably completed as early as 1659.³⁴ From the nineteenth century onwards experts have discussed the issue of whether this text was indeed, as its editor Molkenboer argued, a reply to the budding thought of the young Spinoza.³⁵ I see three reasons for subscribing to Molkenboer's suggestion: a) the specificity of the equation of God and Nature as criticised by Vondel; b) our present, increased awareness of the part Franciscus van den Enden's played in Spinoza's circle of friends: Vondel knew Van den Enden well; c) Filippo Mignini's reconstruction of Spinoza's early career as a philosopher: by 1660, it would seem, Spinoza had composed both the (unfinished) *TIE* and the *KV*. For now we are, I feel, best advised to consider the *Bespiegelingen* as indeed a first refutation not so much of Spinoza but of his 'circle': if the *Bespiegelingen* were indeed completed before the 1660s, it is simply impossible to identify any single author as the leader of the Amsterdam circle of free-thinkers that must have been active from the late 1650s onwards and of which both the young Spinoza, banned from the Jewish community of Amsterdam in 1656, as well as his teacher Franciscus van den Enden were prominent members.³⁶ Akkerman even feels that Vondel and Spinoza simply must have known each other.³⁷

³³ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, 58 and more in general Chapter 1.

³⁴ Vondel, *Werken*, IX, 406–653.

³⁵ Molkenboer's claims were prepared by De Valk, 'Vondel en Spinoza', and rejected simultaneously by Leemans, 'Vondel en Spinoza' and Zijderveld, 'Heeft Vondel Spinoza bestreden?'. Molkenboer replied in: 'Heeft Vondel Spinoza niet bestreden?', which provoked a final reply by Zijderveld: 'Kanttekeningen bij Prof. Molkenboer's verweer'.

³⁶ Mignini, 'Données et problèmes de la chronologie spinozienne entre 1656 et 1665'. Remarkably, Vondel's intervention is ignored by Gullan-Whurr, *Within Reason: A Life of Spinoza* as well as by Nadler, *Spinoza*. Besides Van den Enden, one other member of the Amsterdam group of freethinkers active around 1660 also deserves to be mentioned in this context, although he probably did not belong to Spinoza's and Van den Enden's 'inner circle' and is, again, ignored by Gullan-Whurr and Nadler: Jan Pieterszoon Beelthouwer, for as early as 1661 he published the crudely pantheist *De Hoogste en Laetste bedenckingen over Godt* and in 1664 he also wrote a pamphlet against Vondel, entitled *Adams Antwoort tegen Joost van den Vondel*. See Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, 243; Zilverberg, 'Jan Pieterszoon Beelthouwer (c. 1630–c. 1669) en de joden'; Van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg*, 184–187; Bor-doli, *Ragione e Scritura tra Descartes e Spinoza*, 245–256. Beelthouwer also makes a brief appearance in Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 204.

³⁷ Akkerman, 'A Spinozistic Perspective', 174.

Since man, Vondel argues, is by nature endowed with reason, denying God's existence is as irrational as it is unnatural, although the traditional *a priori* arguments in favour of God's existence fail to convince, since God's essence is beyond our grasp (I, 348). As a consequence, God's existence has to be demonstrated *a posteriori*, that is from His 'work' (I, 367). This, of course, is perfectly in tune with Aquinas, whom Vondel appears to follow closely, for instance where he arrives at the conclusion that God must be considered the 'unmoved mover' of the created universe:

But reason does not permit an infinite regress;
 It comes to a halt before the omnipotence of the Mover
 Who is never moved: for in the concatenation of things
 No thing can set in motion another thing
 Except through the agency of a first power, as a staff
 Moves a stone through someone's hand: thus we meet
 With a Mover who is himself at rest. (I, 395–401)³⁸

Once God's existence has been established, Vondel feels free to launch his attack on the atheists, who call nature God (I, 521 ff.). Still in line with Thomist tradition, Vondel analyses the various meanings of 'nature'. First, it refers to the essence of substances, second to the 'body' of the universe as whole, third to its 'order', and, finally, to its laws. If God is called Nature in so far as He is considered the first cause of Nature, that is as '*natura naturans*', no problems need arise. As soon, however, as God's natural effects or products are identified with His essence, atheism becomes inevitable (I, 603). God is infinite, Nature is not:

The creator and his work are two, not one and the same:
 So the difference between both remains infinite. (I, 931–932)³⁹

Vondel frequently rebukes classical authors such as Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius, and some of his arguments hit ancient and modern 'atheists' alike (see the lines in which he criticises the denial of divine providence, III, 43 ff.), but in particular his insistence on the need to distinguish God from his 'effects' (see also II, 234–236) clearly suggest concern over contemporary atheism, especially once he sets out to argue that being

³⁸ Doch reden laet niet toe onendigh voort te gaen; / Zoo blijft men voor de maght des albewegers staen, / Die noit bewogen wiert: want in het ommevoeren / Der dingen kan geen tweede iet anders ommeroeren / Dan door een eerste maght; gelijck de staf een' steen / Beweeght door iemants hant: dus stuit men dan op een' / Beweger, die zelf rust, (I, 395–401).

³⁹ De schepper en het werck zijn twee, niet eenerley: / Dus blijft het onderscheyt oneindich tussen bey' (I, 931–32).

an ‘unmoved mover’ God cannot be understood to have *any* cause, so God can neither be conceived of as *causa sui* (II, 946). The same holds for his explicit defence of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (V, 94). And although there are some passages in which echoes of Descartes can be heard,⁴⁰ Vondel’s remarks concerning the impossibility of defining the essence of the soul and of arguing ‘mathematically’ concerning its immortality do not suggest great sympathy for Cartesianism:

But to show the immortality of the soul merely by the light
Of reason and nature, as in a view from afar,
To the understanding, since people’s eyes
Cannot see the soul’s essence:
The gracious reader will forgive me for being
Brief in my demonstration, so as not to cover this soul-paper
With sounds that weakly vanish
And seem more clever than profound.
The reasoning that is down-to-earth is too crude,
The proof that slips through your fingers too poor:
The middle way is sound. In affirming a truth
So necessary one should observe brevity and clarity
As far as the nature of the matter permits: for if
Mathematics were demanded here to make demonstrable,
Through measurement and number, the nature of the souls,
Which never, like the body, befell the fate of mortality:
That would be an error. Let no-one demand from reason
A clearer day than the matter can naturally give.
And this satisfies a heart which not, like those too blind to see,
Demands tangible evidence, which cannot here be found. (III, 999–1018)⁴¹

It is also in the *Bespiegelingen*, and more in particular in the analysis provided in this scholarly poem of the freedom of the will, that Vondel comes

⁴⁰ Van Otegem, ‘Vondels bespiegelingen over de nieuwe filosofie’.

⁴¹ Maer om d’onsterflijckheit der ziele alleen door ‘t licht / Van reden en natuure, als in een veergezicht, / Te toonen aen ‘t verstant; dewijl des menschen oogen / Het wezen van de ziel geensins aenschouwen mogen; / Zoo zal een heusche my verschoonen, dat ick hier / Beknoot ben in ‘t bewijs, om niet dit zielpapier / Met klancken te beslaen, die krachte-loos verdwijnen, / En meer scherpzinnigeân dan grontbewijzen schijnen. / De reden is te grof, die laegh langs d’aeerde kruipt, / Het grontbewijs te dun, dat door de vingers druipt: / De middelmaet houdt standt. in ‘t stercken van een waerheit / Zoo noodig, dient gelet op bondigheit, en klaerheit; / Behoudens naer den aert der stoffe: want indien / Men hier de wiskunst eischt, om toonbaer te bediën, / Door maeten en getal, den eigen aert der zielen, / Die nooit, als ‘t lijf, in ‘t lot der sterflijckheit vervielen; / Dat waer een onbescheit. men eisch’ geen’ klaerder dagh / Van reden dan de zaeck natuurlijk geven magh, / En dit vernoeght een hart, dat niet, als ziende blinden, / Een tastbre reden eischt, die hier niet is te vinden (III, 999–1018).

closest to answering the question how an omnipotent God can allow the existence of evil (II, 1113–1122; 1219–1236 and IV, 317–327).⁴²

5. Noah: Conclusion

Once Vondel abandons the vocabulary of scholasticism, however, and starts to reconnoitre the polyphony of possibilities offered by a play, he is able to explore a wider variety of perspectives than the conceptual logic of Scholasticism allows for. The outcome of the clash between Nature and Grace is never in doubt. Vondel lived long enough to see the publication, in 1678, of Adriaan Beverland's *Peccatum Originali* (Original Sin), in which a rare, explicitly libertine reading of Spinoza inspired the author to propose an interpretation of the Fall, glorifying man's natural desire to have sex.⁴³ We don't know how Vondel reacted to this book; perhaps he never saw a copy. But while he was fully entitled to feel that in his biblical tragedies he had already provided a wholesome reply to this 'Spinozist eroticism', *Noah*, on the other hand, and the character of Urania in particular also suggest that Beverland's views may well have put a smile on his face, if only for moment. Being a *great* playwright, Vondel did not shy away from articulating perspectives that he himself was supposed to condemn with such rhetorical panache that until the end of the play, the tension between Nature and Grace remains intact.

In the Dedication to *Noah*, Vondel of course reinforces the necessity to combat the atheists, including their denial of the historical accuracy of Moses' account of the Flood. Vondel does not merely want to convince them of the error of their ways, he claims, for how could a play decide a dispute on the early history of the world? He also states it to have been his purpose to picture God's *justice* (Dedication, 73–76.). As it is precisely the justice of God's 'revenge' that is being questioned severely in *Noah*, it remains to be seen what *Noah* is actually telling us. Perhaps the *Bespiegelingen* offer a clue to the theatrical logic ruling *Noah*, for Vondel's essay in Scholasticism reveals a particular emphasis on the female character of nature. Vondel repeatedly calls Nature 'a woman' (I, 143 and 910) and 'God's daughter' (I, 625). God's power, Vondel continues, produces

⁴² Konst, "Het goet of qaet te kiezen".

⁴³ (Beverland), *Peccatum Originali*. See Elias, 'Het spinozistisch erotisme van Adriaan Beverland'; De Smet, *Hadrianus Beverland (1650–1718)*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 87–88; Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*, 250–256.

'everything' from the 'womb' ['schoot'] (I, 439–441) of nature, that remains passive until 'touched' by God. This is not to say that Vondel employed this scheme consistently in all of his work—in *Adam in Ballingschap* (894–896), for instance, Adam compares Eve to the Moon, following him, the Sun—but both in the *Bespiegelingen* and in *Noah* he does. In *Noah*, there is talk of 'vrouw nature' (vs 214) as well, and Nature is said to have a woman at its helm (vs 793). But it also has, I should like to suggest, a *spokesperson*. For in *Noah*, it is Urania who most consistently speaks out on behalf of Nature's lawlessness, its abundance and the pleasures it procures. It seems no accident, that out of all of *Noah*'s characters, Urania has invariably drawn most attention. In 1864, A.S. Kok felt compelled to call her the most hideous female character ever drawn by Vondel, a 'crude improbability', a 'monstrous exception'.⁴⁴ More recently, Jan Konst called her 'nymphomaniac'.⁴⁵ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen has warned against a misogynous reading of this play, although she too, emphasised the role that Vondel's female characters play as temptresses.⁴⁶

It is true that we are told again and again that Cain's daughters are at the root of the destruction of the first world (vss 56 ff.; 390), and Achiman cries out that 'vrouwenmin' lies at the origins of all evil, once he recognises the end is near (vs 845). On the other hand, if Nature itself is female, shouldn't we perhaps conclude that in Noah's ultimate shame, it also triumphs in that it proves to be indomitable? This much seems clear, that if human reason, evidently male in its conception, is ultimately unable to account for the reasons God may have had, first to allow for the rise of evil, and finally for administering Grace, it remains to be seen who in *Noah* should be deemed the weaker sex: only if we compare Urania to Noah himself, who is a man of God and therefore not entirely 'of this world', she has found her match. Compared to Achiman, who turns out to be a coward and cannot make up his mind for himself, Urania seems definitely superior. At the very end of the play, of course she begs for mercy as well, for being human, even she has to succumb to the authority of her Maker, but to her credit, she is the *last* of the play's characters to do so.

⁴⁴ Kok, *Vondel in eenige van zijn vrouwelijkers*, 17: 'a crude improbability', 'a monstrous exception', 'the most hideous female character ever painted (...) by Vondel.'

⁴⁵ Konst, *Determinatie en vrije wil*, 20.

⁴⁶ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Vondel en 't vrouwelijk dier*, 16–23.

CHAPTER NINE

CENSORSHIP OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DUTCH REPUBLIC

The most recent list of publications prohibited in the Dutch Republic at a States level during the seventeenth century, that is from 1583 to 1700, contains 263 titles.¹ It was put together by the Nijmegen historian Ingrid Weekhout, and consists of titles prohibited by the States General, the States of Holland, the Court of Holland and the *Gecommitteerde Raden*, the body that was responsible for the administration and the execution of the resolutions made by the States of Holland, by far the most important province of the Dutch Republic, and the home of some 80 per cent of all Dutch printing houses. As far as censorship was concerned, the main difference between the States of Holland and the States General was the relatively small contribution the States General made to legislation. Most of the important laws or *Placcaeten*, in particular regarding the prohibition of printed material, were issued by the States of Holland, although as a rule the Court of Holland prepared the legislation of the States and had to approve of its resolutions.²

1. *The Politics of Censorship*

Ingrid Weekhout's list starts with a series of prohibitions reflecting the mounting tensions between the Arminian or Remonstrant faction of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Counter-Reformants. But even after the Synod of Dordt (1619) many Remonstrant treatises, including several written by Grotius, were banned. Despite the establishment of the Remonstrant Fraternity in 1630 in Rotterdam, as late as 1647 Johannes Uyttenboogaert's *Kerkeliche Historie* (1646) was forbidden by the States of Holland, as

¹ Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, Chapters 2 and 7. The period 1583–1600 saw 11 prohibitions. See also Knuttel, *Verboden boeken in de Republiek*. On the eighteenth century, see most recently Jongenelen, *Van smaad tot erger* and Koopmans, 'Censuur. Over of onder de toonbank?'

² Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, 35–42. See also Fruin, *Geschiedenis der staatsinstellingen in Nederland*; Van Gelder, *Getemperde vrijheid*.

was the following year by the States General a Life of Oldenbarneveldt, the Rotterdam statesman and ally of the Remonstrants who had fallen victim to Prince Maurice's dynastic ambitions.

Around the middle of the century, however, after the sudden death of William II in 1650 and the start of the first stadholderless period, orthodox Calvinists could no longer count on much political support. This caused widespread feelings of betrayal among the former Counter-Remonstrants, and served as a further source of inspiration to those who felt attracted to the Puritan cause of the so-called *Nadere Reformatie* (Further Reformation).³ Within a few years orthodox Calvinists such as most notably the Utrecht theologian Gisbert Voetius started radicalising, which led in turn to the prohibition of Voetius' own *Vruchte-lozen biddagh* of 1655.⁴ One of the complaints in this litany against what Voetius held to be the spiritual and moral decline of the Republic concerned the lack of ambition among Dutch politicians to stem the spreading of Cartesianism both inside and outside the academic community. Although during the 1640s Descartes' philosophy had been officially proscribed repeatedly in no uncertain terms by the universities of both Utrecht and Leiden, this hardly put a stop to the remarkably successful proliferation of Cartesianism throughout Dutch academe and far beyond.⁵ Especially after the formation, during the 1660s, of a powerful alliance between Cartesian philosophers and Cocceian theologians, Descartes' philosophy gradually turned into the 'new' philosophy, taught at Leiden in particular.⁶ The decline of Cartesian natural philosophy at Leiden, that set in during the dying decades of the century, had little to do with the 1676 resolution against these 'schadelijke nieuwigheden' (harmful novelties).⁷

The vociferous complaints on the part of the Voetians concerning the moral disintegration of the Dutch nation should not hide from view the fact that Calvinist theologians successfully managed to have a resolution issued by the States of Holland prohibiting the proliferation of

³ Brienen *et al.* (eds.), *De Nadere Reformatie*; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 690–699; Frijhoff and Spies, 1650: Hard-Won Unity, 357–371.

⁴ (Voetius), *Vruchte-lozen biddagh*. See Duker, *Gisbertus Voetius* II, 305 ff.

⁵ Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch* and 'Dutch Cartesian Philosophy'; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapters 2 and 3; Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans*, Chapters 8–14.

⁶ Van der Wall, 'Orthodoxy and Scepticism in the Early Dutch Enlightenment' and 'The Religious Context of the Early Dutch Enlightenment'.

⁷ Wiesenfeldt, *Leerer Raum in Minervas Haus*, Chapters 2 and 3; Otterspeer, *Groepsportret met Dame II*, Chapter 4.

Socinianism.⁸ As we shall see, this *Placcaet* of 1653 was to play a major role in the coming crackdown on radical philosophy as well. Its original intention, however, was strictly theological, and it appears to have been directed against the Collegiants and some of their Mennonite allies who by the middle of the century were widely suspected to host all sorts of anti-trinitarian visitors, in particular in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, as well as in Utrecht, Zeeland and the northern provinces, which harboured many Mennonites. From a Calvinist perspective an official indictment of Socinianism also served to keep up the pressure on the Remonstrants, who were widely held to be Socinians in disguise. In their assessment of the Socinian threat Voetians and Cocceians for once appear to have agreed. Backed by the Leiden faculty of theology, including professor Johannes Cocceius, six reformed ministers had pleaded with the States in favour of an official condemnation of Socinianism, and the States duly obliged by issuing such a *Placcaet*, on 19 July 1653.

The very fact that the Calvinist ministry addressed the States in order to outlaw Socinianism only illustrates that the actual prohibition of books, pamphlets and '*Couranten*' was, of course, outside the area of competence of the religious authorities. The Dutch Reformed Church had no say whatsoever in such secular matters. Of course, local church councils and provincial synods constantly called for the prohibition of all sorts of books, but these complaints had to be brought before the secular authorities in order to be put into effect. Indeed, a National Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church could only be called together with the approval of the States General, and this only happened once, at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618–1619. This is not to say that Dutch ministers were powerless. To begin with, both the Dutch and the Walloon Reformed Churches developed a policy of censorship by its so-called *visitaties* of books their members had published. Since the Dutch Reformed Church only convened at Provincial Synods, it was in no position to develop a national policy of *visitatie*. The Walloon church on the other hand knew no Provincial Synods, but gathered twice a year at a National Synod, and while the outcome of a *visitatie* by its very nature only concerned the internal order of that particular church and the position of the member in question within that church, a negative *visitatie-rapport* could be very damaging indeed, if only

⁸ Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, Chapter 4; Kühler, *Het socinianisme in Nederland, 184–192*; Van Slee, *De geschiedenis van het socinianisme*, 259–264; Van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691)*, Chapter 1; Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, Chapter 6; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 909–916.

because it often served as the first step towards the seduction of the secular authorities into issuing a real prohibition. In fact, authors belonging to the Reformed church were supposed to have their books assessed and approved *before* publication, and some polemicists, such as for instance Pierre Jurieu, may well have used this procedure intentionally, building up his various cases against his many opponents, including most prominently, of course, Pierre Bayle.⁹

2. *Types of Censorship*

A crucial dimension of genuine seventeenth-century censorship that did not involve the suppression of books at all is evident from the measures taken to ensure secrecy in Dutch politics and diplomacy.¹⁰ In 1655 Johan van Messem and Dirck van Ruyven were arrested in The Hague on the accusation that Van Messem, first clerk of Johan de Witt, pensionary of Holland, had been leaking secret information to Van Ruyven, who served as a spy to William Frederick, stadholder of Friesland. At first these two supporters of the House of Orange were especially concerned to keep the stadholder informed about the policies of the States of Holland, but gradually they had become involved in a sinister plot to have De Witt assassinated. In the autumn of 1655, the Court of Holland had Van Messem banned for life from Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht; while Van Ruyven was banned for a decade. Both were found guilty of divulging state secrets. This did not stop Van Ruyven in his career as a spy, for after having settled in Friesland he received a handsome yearly allowance (of 700 guilders) from the stadholder, in whose service he continued his clandestine operations, sending secret information to England. After his discovery, Van Ruyven fled to the Southern Netherlands and subsequently to England, once a warrant for his arrest had been issued. In 1669 Van Ruyven was sentenced to death *in absentia* by the court of Friesland, but following William III's elevation to the stadholdership in 1672, he returned to Friesland and was left alone.

In 1657 a clerk working for the States General, one Christoffel de Groot, was arrested too. De Groot, or so it turned out, had set up a veritable 'spy shop', delivering all sorts of secret resolutions to journalists, foreign

⁹ Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, 237. See also Knetsch, Jurieu, Bayle et Paets'.

¹⁰ De Bruin, *Geheimhouding en verraad*.

envoys, in short, to anyone willing to pay for his services. By this time, the *griffie* of the States was generally known to be such a shambles that De Groot was released and no further action was taken. This did not exactly improve the situation at the *griffie*, for within months more confidential information, this time from the envoy of Sweden, was sold by yet another clerk, Willem van Belle, this time to several German princes. In this case the Court of Holland knew no leniency: by the end of 1658 Van Belle was for ever banned from holding public offices, and on top of that he was banned for eight years from Holland and Zeeland. Yet all these incidents pale into insignificance compared to the truly amazing newsbusiness, established by the celebrated historian of the Dutch Republic Lieuwe van Aitzema, who died in 1669 after having amassed a real fortune by selling for decades all over Europe copies of the official and often top secret documents he also used for his History. Only after his death did the recklessness of his former collaborators, who continued the practice of their former employer, bring this affair to light.

Another scandal that hit the Republic and involved a prominent civil servant was, of course, Abraham de Wicquefort's treason.¹¹ Working for De Witt's secret service, this son of a rich Amsterdam merchant dynasty continually sold all sorts of secret information to Louis XIV. After De Witt's downfall he made sure to be employed by William III, who in 1675 discovered a highly confidential correspondence between De Wicquefort and the duke of Brunswick. But in the end, De Wicquefort escaped his sentence. As a close ally to the former pensionary, the case was fraught with political ambiguities, which slowed down the Court of Holland, giving De Wicquefort time and opportunity to escape and seek the protection of the duke of Brunswick. A series of seventeenth-century procedures against civil servants who corresponded with foreign powers, confirms the impression of Dutch political and legal impotence as regards the protection of state secrets: those who were found out, including Gaspar Dias Ferreira and Isaac Coymans, escaped or were acquitted, to the great dismay, it must be added, of the general public.¹²

To return to the prohibition of printed material, most forbidden literature was either considered obscene or 'injurious to a foreign head of state', or perceived to be religiously or politically unacceptable. Until 1669 pornography was more or less allowed, until it was perceived as possibly

¹¹ See also Everwijn, *Abraham de Wicquefort en zijn proces*.

¹² De Bruin, *Geheimhouding en verraad*, 524 ff.

injurious to diplomatic relations. That same year Charles II ordered the British Ambassador to make sure that a series of pamphlets published by the Rotterdam printer and bookseller Naeranus, in which both the English and the French courts had been ridiculed, were either suppressed or bought up collectively. Louis XIV was furious as well and some nineteenth-century historians felt that it was the continuing publication of such pamphlets as *Histoire Amoureuse des Gaulles* and the *Histoire du Palais Roijal* that finally prompted the King of France to attack the Dutch Republic in 1672. The States of Holland and the Court of Holland issued a general resolution against the publication of obscene literature, and the mayors of Rotterdam, for instance, took action, ordering all local printers and sellers of books to appear at city hall on 2 February 1669, 14.30 hrs., and to hand in all extant copies of eight political and six obscene booklets, including the *Ecole des filles* ('with and without pictures') and *De dwalende hoer* (The Wandering Whore). The result of this particular order remained unclear, however—we just don't know whether the Rotterdam sellers and printers cared to show up, even though all the confiscated copies were supposed to be paid for.¹³

Besides the pressure that was exercised by foreign governments on the Dutch Republic to discipline its book trade, the energetic way in which the reformed church tried to control its members also stood in stark contrast to the inefficiency and sheer incompetence of the Dutch state in protecting its interests abroad and at home. Herman Roodenburg's dissertation on the censorship exercised by the church council, or consistory of the reformed church in Amsterdam during the seventeenth century clearly shows that although ministers were not able to prohibit the spreading of printed material, this did not stop them from exercising real censorship over the lives and minds of their flocks. The majority of Amsterdam cases involved complaints regarding alcohol abuse and 'whoredom', but in some respects, for instance in their remarkable interest in magical practices, the ministers' concerns touched on philosophical issues as well.¹⁴ Once the consistory, that is the ministers and elders of the Dutch reformed community, felt the need to 'correct' or discipline a member, he or she was faced with a pretty daunting interrogation since no lawyers or other representatives were allowed to support the accused, and

¹³ Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, 192–193; Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*, Chapter 3.

¹⁴ Roodenburg, *Onder censuur*, Chapter 5.

even worse, no written documentation was handed over either. On the other hand, the legal powers of the consistory were limited, ranging from issuing an admonition to excommunication, and although during the seventeenth century the Amsterdam consistory excommunicated 33 members, in view of the size of the Amsterdam reformed community, which by 1675 must have counted some 50,000 members, and the frequency of disciplinary action—Roodenburg has counted an average of 47 cases per annum—excommunication was a rare event. After 1642 only one member was excommunicated—the ‘Spinozist’ Willem Deurhoff.

Indeed, Heinz Schilling has emphasised the unique character of early modern Dutch church discipline. Owing to the separation of Church and State in the Dutch Republic, the Church had no access to the secular, legal realm exclusively administered by the State, and it developed an essentially spiritual repertoire of corrective punishment. Ideally, the accused showed remorse and no further action was deemed necessary.¹⁵ Once the accused refused to show repentance, however, things could get very nasty. Thus, on 29 May 1683, Pontiaan van Hattem, a minister of the reformed church in Sint Philipsland in Zeeland, after several years of investigation into the nature of his views, was removed from his office by a special conference of the four classes of Zeeland.¹⁶ Although he apologised for the mayhem caused by his doctrine, he did not recant his opinions. Since Van Hattem continued to preach to his followers, who, cut off from the reformed community, were starting to radicalise considerably, the States of Zeeland in 1692 issued a resolution forbidding Van Hattem to disseminate his views. His books, that appear to have been pretty popular, were also banned.¹⁷

Balthasar Bekker, an acclaimed minister of the reformed church in Amsterdam since 1679, was just as unwilling as Van Hattem was to show remorse. Hence, he was also robbed of his office in 1692, due to his scepticism as regards sorcery and other magical practices. Over the last few years, much has been written about Bekker’s *De betoverde Weereld*, the first two parts of which were published in 1691.¹⁸ At this occasion, I should only like to point to the way in which the Voetian faction within the Dutch

¹⁵ Schilling, “History of Crime” or “History of Sin”?

¹⁶ This was called a *coetus*: a provincial Synod of Zeeland was never called together.

¹⁷ Wielema, *The March of the Libertines*, Chapter 6.

¹⁸ Knuttel, *Balthasar Bekker*; Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, vol. III, Chapter 6; Bekker, *Die bezauerte Welt* (1693), Introduction; Fix, *Fallen Angels*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 21; Wielema, *March of the Libertines*, Chapter 2; Monfils, “Een boek gaat door de wereld.”

reformed church proved able to destroy the career of a well-known, well-connected, extremely able and rich minister such as Bekker *despite* the reluctance of his own consistory to let him go. After the publication of the first half of *De betoverde Weereld* in the Spring of 1691, the consistory of Amsterdam immediately discussed its contents, but even though it felt disturbed by its implications and irritated at Bekker's failure to have his book approved prior to its publication, it had to be forced to remove Bekker from his post by a series of interventions from the reformed communities of Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Zeeland in particular. Once a *national* debate had started on *De betoverde Weereld*, and once it became clear that Bekker would not budge, the North Holland Synod issued a severe condemnation of his views, leaving Amsterdam no other choice than to let him go. The mayors of Amsterdam, however, continued to pay his salary and refused to prohibit *De betoverde Weereld*. Only in Utrecht was it officially banned, and the many thousands of copies that were sold throughout the Republic, including the translations that were made into French, German and English hardly suggest that the spreading of Bekker's views was thwarted in any serious way. But it remains to be seen whether this could account for the harm done to Bekker. In the end, and to his considerable grief, he was even excluded from the Lord's Supper.

Bekker's fate has often been compared to Bayle's, and rightly so. The marquis D'Argens may well have been correct to argue that without the possibilities offered by Dutch liberty Bayle would not have been able to publish half of his work, and it is true that Bayle's works were not prohibited by the secular Dutch authorities at any moment, but nevertheless in 1693 Bayle lost his position as a professor of Philosophy and History at the Illustrious School of Rotterdam.¹⁹ This only came to pass after the local Walloon consistory had set up a French-Dutch committee, that issued an indictment of Bayle's *Pensées diverses*, leaving the Rotterdam mayors—a body that had just been purged by the stadholder of anti-Orangist elements, following local riots—no other choice than to fire Bayle, and strip him of his pension—a decision that admittedly barely affected Bayle financially since his connection with the Paets family and his publisher Reinier Leers guaranteed a regular income. But I am not at all convinced that Bayle really took his dismissal as laconic as often has been suggested.²⁰

¹⁹ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 118.

²⁰ Bost, *Pierre Bayle*, 367, quotes Bayle's comment that he felt neither 'regret ni d'inquiétude' over his dismissal, but Bayle fought for his position. Afterwards he tried to put on a brave face. See also Hazewinkel, 'Pierre Bayle à Rotterdam'; Labrousse, *Pierre*

3. *Philosophy*

Traditionally, admirers of Dutch ‘tolerance’ have emphasised the local authorities’ unwillingness to cooperate with church demands for censorship, and accounts of bookprinters and sellers publicly advertising their ‘clandestine’ merchandise have become a standard element in accounts that extol the virtues of Dutch ‘toleration’.²¹ We also know that if a local magistrate failed to arrange provincial support for its decrees relating to the prohibiting of philosophical works, such measures could remain perfectly ineffective, as is suggested, for instance, by the fate of the Utrecht ban, first of Descartes’ *Epistola ad Voetium* in 1642, and subsequently of all works relating to Cartesianism. Voetius had every right to be incensed. However, all the truly spectacular cases of Dutch philosophical censorship, leading to extremely heavy fines, prison sentences, and even loss of life, were also instigated and executed at a strictly local level. No provincial, let alone national initiatives were taken to correct the magistrates.²² Some of the official measures taken against the selling of forbidden literature were pretty efficient.

Both the first and the last books to be prohibited in the Golden Age were written by philosophers, namely D.V. Coornhert, whose examination of the Heidelberg Catechism was forbidden, and Johannes Duijkerius, the second part of whose Spinozistic *roman à clef* on the adventures of one Philopater was banned.²³ Coornhert’s book may have been essentially theological, besides a (Roman Catholic) theologian and a brilliant advocate of religious toleration he was also a playwright, a poet, and the author

Bayle I, Chapter 8; Rex, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and Religious Controversy*; Knetsch, *Pierre Jurieu*; Leeuwenburgh, ‘Pierre Bayle in Dutch Politics (1682–93)’; Bots, *De Fransman Pierre Bayle en Nederland*.

²¹ Van Gelder, *Getemperde vrijheid* is a clear example, in which the supposed ineffectiveness of Dutch censorship is hailed. See also, for instance, Méchoulan, *Amsterdam au temps de Spinoza*. Weekhout’s study attempts to redress the balance by focussing on the cities of Rotterdam, Den Bosch and Deventer.

²² The first important collection of papers in which the image of an essentially tolerant Dutch nation was criticised coherently was edited by Gijswijt-Hofstra: *Een schijn van verdraagzaamheid*. See also Bergsma, ‘Church, State and People’; Mout, ‘Limits and Debates’; Frijhoff and Spies, *1650: Hard-Won Unity*, Chapters 3 and 6. See also the recent series, edited by Rotondò: *Studi e testi*.

²³ Coornhert, *Proeve van de Heydelberghsche catechismo*; (Johannes Duijkerius?), *Vervolg van’t leven van Philopater*. The *Vervolg* was the radical second part of this two-part project that took off with the publication of *Het leven van Philopater* in 1691. Both parts were edited and introduced in 1991 by Gerardine Maréchal.

of the first European Ethics in the vernacular.²⁴ Coornhert and Duijkerius may also serve to remind us of the monumental developments that took place in seventeenth-century thought, ranging from the Reformation to the Radical Enlightenment. Before we continue, however, by taking a closer look at Dutch censorship of philosophical literature, it should be added that this only constitutes a very small aspect of Dutch censorship as such, since merely a handful of forbidden titles were truly philosophical.

The first prohibition at a provincial level of a genuinely philosophical treatise only occurred after the assassination of the brothers De Witt in 1672, at the end of the stadholderless period, for it was only in 1673, on 13 December, that the States of Holland prohibited both Spinoza's *TPP* and Lodewijk Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* (1666). Both books had been condemned fiercely by the ecclesiastical authorities and both had been 'refuted' in many polemical treatises as well. They had been reissued under fake imprints. In 1674 the Court of Holland confirmed this measure, adding to the list of forbidden books both the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* and Abraham van Berckel's Dutch translation of Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1667). Only four years later Spinoza's *OP* was banned as well.²⁵ In his *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, Jacob Freudenthal put together the relevant resolutions issued against the *TPP* by consistories all over Holland and Utrecht, resulting in its prohibition by the States of Holland.²⁶ Jonathan Israel has added important data, in particular relating to the reaction in Leiden and Utrecht. Today these documents make great reading for Spinoza scholars, but their contemporary impact should not be underestimated. As early as April 1670 the reformed consistory of Utrecht put the *TPP* on its agenda, and within weeks Amsterdam and Haarlem followed suit.²⁷ As early as July 1670, at the Synod of North Holland, the *TPP* was referred to as the most blasphemous book ever written.²⁸ A few

²⁴ Coornhert, *Zedekunst*. See on Coornhert: Voogt, *Religious Constraint on Trial*; Fleurkens, *Stigtelijke lust*.

²⁵ Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, 385–386 and 102–107. On the early reception of the *Interpres*, see Roberto Bordoli, *Ragione e Scritura*. On the early reception of the *TPP*, see Van der Wall, 'The *Tractatus theologicopoliticus* and Dutch Calvinism'; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 3. On the *Bibliotheca* and the *Leviathan*, see Vercruyse, ‘‘Bibliotheca fratrum polonorum’’; Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, Chapter 1. On Dutch reactions to Hobbes, see Petry, 'Hobbes and the Early Dutch Spinozists' and Malcom, *Aspects of Hobbes*, Chapter 14.

²⁶ Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 121 ff. See also Nadler, *Spinoza*, Chapters 11 and 12.

²⁷ Israel, 'The Banning of Spinoza's Works', 9–10.

²⁸ Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 122.

days later the Synod of South Holland joined the effort to have the book banned, and in April 1671 the Court of Holland officially took notice of the complaints regarding the *TPP* as well as the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, the *Leviathan*, and the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*. Clearly, however, Spinoza's 'eminently slanderous' treatise was regarded as the worst of them.²⁹ Next, the States of Holland announced an investigation into the complaints.

Somehow, the proceedings slowed down, perhaps owing to the habitual reluctance of De Witt to curb freedom of thought, no doubt also because of the political turmoil that was to end his reign. But the Synod of North Holland kept up the pressure, and when by the end of 1673 new editions of the *TPP* were identified, carrying fake title pages, the Leiden consistory immediately informed the States of Holland, who by this time had already decided to issue a resolution that was duly confirmed by the Court of Holland. Explicitly referring to the measures taken against the proliferation of Socinianism in its earlier resolution of 1653, the Court declared that the four titles now officially banned slandered the name of God and His attributes, including his essential Trinity as well as the divinity and satisfaction of His Son. Moreover, the Court argued, they undermined the authority of Scripture.³⁰ As far as the Church was concerned, however, this was not the end of the affair. In 1675 the reformed consistory of The Hague called upon its members to remain on the lookout in case Spinoza should be so bold as to publish other books.³¹ As soon as the *OP* appeared the Court of Holland took action, pressured once more by the consistories of Leiden, The Hague and Utrecht. A further resolution of the States of Holland, prohibiting Spinoza's *Opera*, was taken on 25 June 1678.³²

Ten years earlier, however, in 1668, that is before the downfall of De Witt, by far the worst case of philosophical censorship had occurred in Amsterdam, when Spinoza's friend Adriaan Koerbagh had been incarcerated and had died shortly afterwards.³³ The facts concerning his arrest

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 139–141. On the first editions of the *TPP*, see Kingma and Offenberg, *Bibliography of Spinoza's Works up to 1800* and now also Gerritsen, 'Printing Spinoza—Some Questions'.

³¹ Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 147–148; 151–152.

³² *Ibid.*, 179–181.

³³ Doct van Flensburg, 'Procedures teghens Adriaen Koerbagh en deszelfs broeder Joannes'; Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, Chapter 10; Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza*, Chapter 5; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 10; Wielema, 'Adriaan Koerbagh: Biblical Criticism and Enlightenment'.

will be only too familiar: Adriaan and his younger brother Johannes grew up in Amsterdam, studied at Utrecht and Leiden, and during the 1660s became acquainted with the group of freethinkers known as Spinoza's 'circle', among whom they struck up a special friendship with Abraham van Berckel, the translator of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. In 1664 Adriaan published a legal dictionary and a political pamphlet, to be followed by the infamous *Bloemhof* (Flower Bed), in 1668. But by this time, Adriaan and Johannes were already being watched closely by the Amsterdam consistory on account of their unruly lifestyle and their 'heretical' opinions.

The Amsterdam consistory started a serious investigation into the views of the brothers Koerbagh. At first, Adriaan, a lawyer and physician, was ignored, but Johannes was supposedly a reformed theologian himself, a candidate to the ministry, so he was interrogated severely and repeatedly. When in January 1668 the *Bloemhof* appeared, packed with wayward and often very funny explanations for dozens of philosophical and theological words and concepts, the reformed consistory addressed the mayors of Amsterdam, on whose orders all the copies available in the bookshops of Amsterdam were confiscated. Adriaan made a run for it, but in April news reached the Amsterdam magistrates that he had gone into hiding in Culemborg, where he was busy preparing the publication of the sequel to the *Bloemhof*, entitled *Een Ligt schijnende in duystere plaatsen* (A Light Shining in Dark Places). Meanwhile, Johannes, whose behaviour during the interrogations had grown bolder, had been arrested, as had their accomplice Abraham van Berckel, and when in May the Amsterdam consistory took hold of a pre-print of the first part of *Een Ligt*, Koerbagh's Utrecht printer panicked and surrendered the remaining copies, which together with the entire manuscript were sent to Amsterdam. As a consequence the entire edition was suppressed successfully. (Today only two copies appear to have survived).³⁴ Now the hunt for the fugitive Adriaan Koerbagh reached its climax: wearing a wig and a false moustache he had gone into hiding in Leiden, where soon he was betrayed and handed over to the Amsterdam magistrates who returned him to Amsterdam. On 20 July 1668 the interrogation started. Adriaan took the blame, Johannes and Van Berckel were left off the hook. Bravely, Adriaan denied any involvement of his friend Spinoza in the composition of *Een Ligt*, and

³⁴ The only edition available today was made on the basis of the The Hague-copies, now kept in the Museum Meermanno Westreenianum (signatures M 7 D 1 and 2): Koerbagh, *Een Ligt schijnende in duystere plaatsen*. Henri Krop has informed me of the copy kept in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, sign. Z f 1980 <o>, which is now lost.

declared to be solely responsible for its contents. On 27 July, on the basis of the 1653 resolution against the proliferation of Socinian, that is anti-trinitarian views, Adriaan, then aged 35, was sentenced to a 4,000 guilders fine, 2,000 guilders costs, ten years' imprisonment in the Amsterdam *Rasphuis*, and a subsequent ten years' banishment from Holland. Within months Adriaan died in jail, broken by its rigours, to be followed by his younger brother only three years later.

The fate of the brothers Koerbagh has often been interpreted as an exceptional event not at all representative of the otherwise tolerant history of the Dutch Republic. Within decades, however, a very similar trial took place in Amsterdam, following the publication of the second part of Johannes Duijkerius' *Philopater*.³⁵ Duijkerius was a former proponent of the reformed church whose severe stuttering thwarted his career as a minister, and who in 1691, when the row over Bekker's *De betoverde Weereld* had just started, published a novel on the adventures of one Philopater, an impressionable and religiously obsessed Voetian student of theology who lost his sanity and then gradually regained it after joining the Cocceio-Cartesian alliance in Dutch reformed theology. In the second part, however, Philopater turned into a genuine Spinozist, mocking the entire reformed heritage. The reformed consistories of Leiden, Rotterdam and The Hague immediately denounced the book, upon which the States of Friesland officially banned the book in January 1698. The Amsterdam ministers renewed their campaign, identifying the anonymous author and publisher as, respectively, Johannes Duijkerius and one Aart Wolsgrynn, a noted 'Spinozist', who under interrogation by the Amsterdam magistrate admitted to having published the work. The text had been sent to him anonymously, or so he claimed, giving Duijkerius the opportunity to deny any involvement, and some scholars suspect that Wolsgrynn was indeed the main author of the *Vervolg van 't leven van Philopater*.³⁶ Whereas Duijkerius was released (but subsequently robbed of his right to preach), Wolsgrynn was meted out a heavy sentence: eight years imprisonment in the *Rasphuis*, 25 years banishment from Holland, and a 4,000 guilders fine. Although Wolsgrynn appears to have been released after a few years imprisonment, he died a broken and ruined man.

³⁵ Hubbeling, 'Philopater'; Van Bunge, 'Philopater, de radicale Verlichting en het einde van de Eindtijd'; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 315–320. See also Van Geel, *De verspreiding van het radicale Nederlandse Verlichtingsdenken*.

³⁶ Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*, 292–297.

But Eric Walten died in jail just as Koerbagh did, after having been arrested in 1694, charged with blasphemy.³⁷ In his case the Court of Holland took action, but since Walten at the time lived in The Hague this affair seems to have been essentially local as well, and what is more, the Rotterdam authorities bluntly refused to hand over the manuscripts found in Walten's Rotterdam lodgings, and they were supported in this by the King of England himself, in whose service Walten had written a number of political pamphlets. But it was the inflammatory way in which he took up Bekker's defense that caused his downfall. Faced with his critics, Bekker may have been stubborn, but Walten not only went far beyond Bekker's careful deconstruction of biblical accounts of magic, he added insult to injury by arguing that the procedures against the Amsterdam minister had revealed the Reformed Synod to be precisely what it was: a lunatic asylum ('Een Sothuys van de gekken'). Walten failed to show any remorse during interrogation and some of the testimonies brought in by witnesses were very damaging indeed—Walten was for instance reported to harbour pretty eccentric ideas on many biblical characters including Christ, and on top of that he was supposed to have boasted about familiarity with the infamous but elusive treatise *De tribus impostoribus*. In the end the Court of Holland simply 'forgot' about him, leaving him to rot in jail, where he died in 1697, probably by suicide.

The traditional view that no serious censorship existed in the Dutch Republic owing to its lack of any strong, national center of power seems at odds with the fate of Koerbagh, Duijkerius' publisher Aart Wolsgrynn and Eric Walten.³⁸ Once local authorities decided to act, the absence of an efficiently organised political apparatus orchestrating national censorship enabled them to do so. Local autonomy did not necessarily further the cause of freedom of thought. In Spinoza's case too, local consistories built up the pressure to have his books banned, and these books were seized by local officials. Religious diversity may well have flourished owing to this lack of a strong central government, but legal impotence at a national level also facilitated local initiatives against radical philosophy and its implications for the reformed creed. As a last resort, when magistrates

³⁷ Knuttel, 'Ericus Walten'; Van Bunge, 'Eric Walten (1663–1697)'; Israel, *Monarchy, Orangism, and Republicanism* and 'The Intellectual Origins of Modern Democratic Republicanism (1660–1720)'; Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, 145–149.

³⁸ For otherwise convincing, positive assessments of the lack of political unity in the Dutch Republic, see for instance Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic* and Prak, *Gouden Eeuw*.

failed to co-operate, a local consistory could also decide to *excommunicate* its erring members, as happened in 1695 to the Amsterdam chest-maker and philosopher Willem Deurhoff, who was widely held to be a Spinozist.³⁹ This self-taught thinker, who only knew Dutch, not only entertained the customers of his shop at the Warmoesstraat with lengthy expositions on the essential agreement between Cartesian metaphysics and reformed dogmatics, but also wrote a series of highly ambitious treatises, some of which were clearly inspired by Spinozism too. Hence, in 1695 he was interrogated repeatedly and increasingly aggressively by the Amsterdam consistory, which, faced with Deurhoff's outspoken refusal to retract his views, saw no other option than to excommunicate him by August of that same year. For decades to come, followers of Deurhoff were harassed by reformed consistories throughout the province of Holland, and until the end of the eighteenth century reformed synods would warn against the evils of 'Deurhovism'.

4. Conclusion

Sporadic as Dutch censorship may often have been, there can be little doubt that seventeenth-century philosophers were wise to be careful. But on the matter of early modern self-censorship it is extremely difficult to reach any firm conclusions. We know that dissimulation, or what often was termed 'Nicodemism', was part and parcel of the repertoire of any seventeenth-century author leaning to heterodoxy.⁴⁰ Some books were simply not published while their authors were still alive, including most notably Descartes' *Le Monde*, that was suppressed by the author himself following Galileo's indictment in 1633, and Spinoza's *E*, that could have been published as early as 1675, but wasn't because Spinoza was advised by his friends to keep a low profile after the hostile reception of the *TPP*.⁴¹ Spinoza's early correspondence speaks eloquently about his fears not to be understood by the wider public, and when in 1671 he heard about plans to have a Dutch translation of the *TPP* published, he made sure that these were put to rest out of fear that a Dutch version would only cause the

³⁹ Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, vol. III, 348–349; Krop, 'Radical Cartesianism in Holland: Spinoza and Deurhoff'; Wielema, *March of the Libertines*, Chapter 5.

⁴⁰ See Zagorin, *Ways of Lying*.

⁴¹ Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica*, Chapter 1.

book to be banned.⁴² In my view, the trouble with much that has been written recently on self-imposed censorship of early modern philosophy and strategic styles of ambiguity has yielded far too much wilful speculation as regards the true ‘intentions’ of ambiguous texts. What is more, Koerbagh’s *Een Ligt*, Spinoza’s *TTP*, Bekker’s onslaught on belief in Satanic intervention, Walten’s pamphlets, and Duijkerius’ *Vervolg van Philopater* were nothing if not very straightforward in the way they chastised religious prejudices and political injustice.

The most obvious way to circumvent censorship seems to have been to secure *anonymous* publication. One of the most notorious pamphlets that appeared during the general crisis of 1672, entitled *Hollants venezoen*, a poem in which it was argued that the Prince of Orange was to be held responsible for the war with the French and the English since he had bribed the governments of both countries only in order to seize power himself, was generally considered to have been written by the Rotterdam Mennonite Joachim Oudaen.⁴³ But Oudaen’s refusal to appear before the Rotterdam magistrate apparently sufficed to get him off the hook. After several weeks of imprisonment, even the likely printer of *Hollants venezoen*, Izaak Naeranus, was released, since he stubbornly refused co-operation too (and since the States-faction, traditionally prominent in Rotterdam, continued to support its allies as long as it was able to).⁴⁴ Lodewijk Meyer and Johannes Duijkerius also managed to keep their responsibility for, respectively, the *Interpres* and the *Philopater*-novels a secret. Although these books were banned, their authors were left alone. As far as we now know, even Spinoza, whose authorship of the *TTP* was common knowledge, after his excommunication from the Jewish community, was never subject to any legal investigation, not even after the downfall of De Witt, arguably because the Dutch Reformed Church in particular still regarded him as an essentially Jewish author, for whose delusions it could not be held responsible.

As far as I can tell, two conclusions seem in order. First, it seems clear that the absence of any centralised censorship, while it no doubt contributed to the characteristic *relative ‘tolerance’* of the seventeenth-century Republic, did not prevent Dutch authorities to act forcefully at a local level if they saw fit. In their own towns, magistrates did not need the

⁴² Spinoza, *Letters*, Letter 13; Letter 44.

⁴³ See on him Melles, *Joachim Oudaen*; Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, Chapter 3.

⁴⁴ Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*, 196–206.

support of the States to suppress the proliferation of books they felt should not be allowed to reach Dutch readers. While such measures may not have affected the total volume of copies available on the market, they must have had *some* effect, if only because *every* bookshop is a local one. At the time, foreign commentators such as the marquis D'Argens, but also Sir William Temple, Jean Brun, Anthony Collins, and a host of lesser known authors impressed by the massive influx of foreign refugees and by the startling confessional diversity in the Dutch Republic, as well as by its thriving book trade, may well have felt that the liberty of thought in the Dutch Republic was virtually boundless, and thus they helped to create the myth of a nation where no limit was put to intellectual liberty.⁴⁵ Let's not forget, however, that it took some time before Philosophy came into its own in the Dutch Republic. Initially, Theology took center stage, and the fate of the Remonstrants during the first half of the seventeenth century will be only too familiar. As soon as, during the second half of the century, Philosophy also became a real factor in the public arena, Dutch authorities did not hesitate to suppress views they deemed dangerous.⁴⁶ And while such religious minorities as the Remonstrants in the end managed to survive 'Dordt' splendidly, and after 1630 took their place among the many other denominations thriving alongside the Dutch Reformed Church, *individual* authors whose philosophy drew the attention of the secular authorities appear to have been much more easy victims of persecution than minority congregations. Even the *Placcaet* that was issued against Socinianism could never be brought to bear on any religious community, simply because even in the Dutch Republic no Socinian Fraternity ever existed. It was only enforced successfully against single individuals.

Second, to any historian of philosophy it should be a sobering thought that, apparently, the extent to which the publication of philosophical views was allowed, was still determined entirely on *theological* grounds. In particular the texts that together made up the early Radical Enlightenment were banned not for philosophical reasons, for instance the rejection of Aristotelianism, but for promoting Socinianism. At no stage in the history of the Dutch Republic did the secular authorities adhere to or even favour any one particular philosophy. Even the academic resolutions of the 1640s according to which Peripatetic philosophy was to remain the

⁴⁵ I am referring, of course, to Temple, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands* and Collins, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*.

⁴⁶ Dibon, *L'Enseignement philosophique dans les universités néerlandaises*; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 1.

official school of thought at Utrecht and Leiden, turned out to be largely ineffective. This, ironically perhaps, seems to imply that the author of the first major philosophical text ever to be banned in Holland, was right in turning his attention toward the civil authorities, for they alone were in a position to exercise genuine censorship and more often than not had acted exactly as they should: Spinoza in his *TTP* argued in favour of the *libertas philosophandi* precisely by demonstrating that Philosophy could not possibly harm Theology, since these two disciplines in his view had nothing in common.⁴⁷

But as will be clear by now, the secular authorities in the Dutch Republic were not at all afraid to exercise their right to curb the freedom of thought. Indeed, Spinoza himself admitted the possible *desirability* of secular censorship, feeling obliged to state in his Preface:

that I have written nothing that I would not willingly submit to the scrutiny and judgment of my country's government. If anything of what I say is deemed by them to contravene the laws of our country or to be injurious to the common good, I am ready to withdraw it. I realise that I am human and may have erred. But I have taken great pains to avoid error and to ensure that my writing should be in complete agreement with our country's laws, with piety, and with morality.⁴⁸

With the exception of Abraham Cuffeler, the author of the plainly Spinozistic *Specimen artis ratiocinandi* (1684), who may have escaped legal proceedings by his departure for Germany in the service of the Brandenburg-Africa Company, it would appear that no major radical Cartesian or Spinozist publication was not acted against in one way or another either by the Dutch Reformed Church or by the local magistrates.⁴⁹ Frederik van Leenhof's fate as well as Hendrik Wyermars', Isabella de Moerloose's and Simon Tyssot de Patot's, but also the continuing harassment of admirers of Van Hattem, among whom Spinozism seems to have been widespread, Bekker and Deurhoff clearly confirm the continuing perils of being associated with the Radical Enlightenment during the eighteenth century.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Chapter 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁹ On Cuffeler: Van der Meer van Kuffeler, *Stamboek van het geslacht Van Kuffeler*; Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza*, pp. 143–163; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 311–314.

⁵⁰ See on Van Leenhof, the deposed Zwolle minister, and author of *Den hemel op aarde*: Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église*, Chapter 5; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 22; Wielema, *March of the Libertines*, Chapter 4. Hendrik Wyermars published *Den ingebeelde Chaos*, and spent fifteen years in jail for it. See Wielema, 'Hendrik Wyermars (c. 1685–na 1749)'. Isabella de Moerloose was jailed for more than twelve years and taken into a

The refusal of both the academic authorities and the States of Holland to enforce decrees against the spreading of Cartesianism might be taken to suggest a lack of *interest* on their part in Philosophy as such. Yet the fact that many of the most important radical philosophical texts to have been produced in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic were actively suppressed, demonstrates to all intents and purposes that the Dutch authorities fully recognised the relevance if not the potentially revolutionary impact of Philosophy. This seems also evident from the remarkable treatment of pornography in the Dutch Republic. As we have seen, until 1669 it was largely ignored, until it was perceived as jeopardising diplomatic relations with England and, of course, France in particular. A second reason, however, for the suppression of pornographic novels and the persecution of their authors and especially their publishers, seems to have been their philosophical impact.⁵¹ Seventeenth-century Dutch pornography has for a long time been almost completely neglected by scholars, but a challenging recent study by Inger Leemans has demonstrated that during the final quarter of the seventeenth century a small but thriving libertine culture of professional pornographers emerged for a while, producing a series of lurid novels in the vernacular, some of which indeed appear to have served as vehicles for radical thought.

This brings me to my last example of a seventeenth-century author who incurred the wrath of the Dutch establishment and was to feel the full force of its discontent, for on 26 October 1679 Adriaan Beverland, a 29-year-old native of Middelburg was arrested and thrown into the dungeon of Leiden University on account of his publication in that same year of a revised edition of his *De Prostibulis Veterum*, entitled *De Peccato Originali*.⁵² This very learned treatise on the origins of Original Sin, which to his mind had to be sought in the natural urge of man to procreate, clearly revealed traces of Spinozism and had outraged the Reformed Synods of both North and South Holland, upon which the States of Holland had it banned on 12 September 1679. Its author, being a student of Leiden

lunatic asylum on account of her *Vrede tractate*. See Roodenburg, 'Isabella de Moerloose'. On Simon Tyssot de Patot, who was fired as professor of the Deventer Illustrious School: Rosenberg, *Tyssot de Patot and His Work*. Vermij has questioned Tyssot's authorship of the anonymous *Voyage et avantures de Jaques Massé*, 'Een aantekening over de schrijver van *Les Voyages de Jaques Massé*', that was followed by a brief discussion in the same journal, 23–38 and by Rosenberg, 'Tyssot de Patot et Jaques Massé; un problème d'attribution?'

⁵¹ Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*, Chapter 6.

⁵² Dingwall, *Very Peculiar People*, Chapter 4; De Smet, *Hadrianus Beverlandus (1650–1716)*, Chapter 1.

University, was left to the care of his academic supervisors, who took him into custody. On 25 November the academic court banned Beverland from the university and from Holland and Zeeland. After his release on 4 December he moved to Utrecht, where his every move was closely monitored by university officials, who were only too relieved to find that in March of the following year he set sail for England to find employment first with the Earl of Carbery as Gentleman of the Horse and subsequently with Isaac Vossius as his personal secretary. After Vossius' death in 1689, however, Adriaan Beverland got into serious financial and psychological problems. In 1716 he died penniless in London, very probably mad, and certainly a refugee from the Dutch Republic.

CHAPTER TEN

NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY DUTCH SPINOZISM

1. *Johannes van Vloten*

There are few countries, if any, in which Spinoza's writings have provoked such a wide variety of reactions as they did in the Netherlands, the country in which he was born and where he died. (As far as we know now, he only left the province of Holland once, in 1673, for a short trip to the city of Utrecht.) In the final quarter of the seventeenth century a series of remarkably detailed refutations of both the *TTP* and the *E* appeared, but the number of supporters of 'Spinozism' both among the so-called '*chrétiens sans Église*' and among Dutch '*esprits forts*' should not be underestimated. During the eighteenth century, however, interest in Spinoza waned considerably and despite an early, brief Dutch version of the German *Pantheismusstreit* and a feeble attempt by the Harderwijk professor of philosophy Bernard Nieuhoff (1747–1831) to draw attention to his seventeenth-century countryman, Spinoza hardly played any part in Dutch High Enlightenment discourse.¹

Although the Leiden historian of Dutch philosophy Ferdinand Sassen was surely mistaken when he declared that 'Dutch Spinozism' only took off in the second half of the nineteenth century, he was right in his assessment of this late nineteenth-century phenomenon as an essentially 'propagandist' movement. During the early part of the twentieth century it would evolve into a more 'philosophical' ('levensbeschouwelijke') phase, which by the late 1960s would in its turn be replaced by a more scholarly approach.² It should be added that Sassen's verdict on the entire history of nineteenth-century Dutch philosophy was rather severe: the absence of an Erasmus, a Spinoza, or a Hemsterhuis in his eyes had resulted in ubiquitous mediocrity. Siebe Thissen, however, has pointed out Sassen's failure to recognize the cultural significance of the practice of philosophy

¹ Nieuhoff, *Over spinozisme*. See Würzner, 'Bernard Nieuhoff', Koopmans; 'Het Alleven of de wereldziel', and, more importantly, Krop, 'A Dutch *Pantheismusstreit*'.

² Sassen, *Geschiedenis van de wijsbegeerte in Nederland*, 364–373. See also his review of the thesis by Van der Bend, *Het spinozisme van Dr. J.D. Bierens de Haan* in *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* 63 (1971), 281–282.

in the newly established Kingdom of the Netherlands beyond the confines of academia.³ Thissen has pointed to the flowering of all sorts of philosophical initiatives in non-academic circles, including Masonic lodges and societies of freethinkers, as well as the general cultural journals of the day, which were simply ignored by Sassen.

Indeed, when Leiden University in 1896 offered one of its chairs in Philosophy to the lower class, self-taught Hegelian G.J.P.J. Bolland (1854–1922), this should probably be considered as a gesture of recognition on the part of the academic establishment, finally admitting the relevance and in some cases the genuine quality of ‘amateur’ philosophers.⁴ Siebe Thissen has demonstrated how the first upsurge of Dutch interest in Spinoza in the nineteenth century started in Masonic circles: in 1855 the second edition of *Spinoza. Ein Denkerleben* by Berthold Auerbach made a considerable impact, as was evident from the rave review it received in the most important cultural journal of the time by P.A.S. van Limburg Brouwer (1829–1873).⁵ The popularity of the poetic Spinozism of the botanist, duellist and former soldier of the French Foreign legion Franz Junghuhn (1809–1864) also served to announce the subsequent rise to fame and notoriety of Johannes van Vloten (1818–1883), clearly the most important nineteenth-century Dutch Spinozist, who actually managed to turn Spinoza’s philosophy into the subject of heated, philosophical debate.⁶

Who was this man, whose name has remained familiar with Spinozists all over the world, if only on account of the editions he produced with the Amsterdam philosopher and linguist J.P.N. Land (1834–1897) of Spinoza’s *OP* as well as of the *ST*? Van Vloten surely deserves a full and detailed biography, but to this day we unfortunately have merely a handful of biographical sketches.⁷ Born in Kampen in 1818, into a well-to-do

³ Thissen, ‘Vrij van praal en zinnelijkheid’; ‘Een wijsgerige beweging in Nederland’, and most importantly: *De spinozisten*.

⁴ See on Bolland, Klever, *Jeugd en Indische jaren van G.J.P.J. Bolland*; Otterspeer, *Bolland*.

⁵ Van Limburg Brouwer, ‘Het leven van een denker’. Auerbach’s book was translated by Dionys Burger: *Spinoza. Het leven van een denker*. On Burger, see Wielema, ‘Dionys Burger over Spinoza’; Steenbakkers, ‘De Nederlandse vertalingen van de *Ethica*’, 14–17.

⁶ (Junghuhn), *Licht en Schaduwbeelden*. See Sep, ‘De receptie van *Licht—en schaduwbeelden*'; Beekman, ‘Junghuhn’s Perception of Javanese Nature'; Thissen, ‘Images of Light and Shadow'.

⁷ See, on Van Vloten in general: Van der Tak, ‘De Joanne a Vloten (Johannes van Vloten)'; Mees-Verwey, *De betekenis van Johannes van Vloten*; Offringa, ‘Johannes van Vloten'; Noordenbos and Spijt, *Atheïsme en vrijdenken in Nederland*, 46–57; Van Suchtelen, ‘Le spinozisme de Jan van Vloten'; Thissen, *De spinozisten*, Chapter 4.

family, he studied Theology at Leiden from 1835 to 1843. Six years later, however, he left the Dutch Reformed Church to embark upon a career as professor of History and Dutch at the Illustrious School of Deventer. After a series of quarrels with his Deventer colleagues he gave up his chair in 1867 and settled in Bloemendaal near Haarlem where he became chief editor of *De Levensbode*, a freethinkers' journal which would soon turn into the main platform for the debates concerning Spinozism now about to take off. Although Van Vloten held many intererests and was on intimate terms with the cultural and literary elite of the Netherlands, including for instance Eduard Douwes Dekker (*Multatuli*), by the time he moved to Bloemendaal the proliferation and defence of Spinozism had clearly become his main concern, and the inauguration of Spinoza's statue at the Paviljoensgracht in The Hague in 1880 was probably the apogee of a life largely devoted to the propaganda for his seventeenth-century idol.⁸ Van Vloten had worked tirelessly to have this statue erected and during the occasion he summarized in no uncertain terms what Spinoza had meant to him. Why, Van Vloten asked rhetorically, celebrate the achievements of Spinoza? Because he had completed the Reformation, based on the principle that it was the 'the inalienable right of man to moral and intellectual development'. Spinoza had been able to achieve this Reformation, Van Vloten argued, since he had discovered the real power of human reason. For the use of reason is a liberating force, leading to a state of joy in which wisdom rules.⁹

Let's first return to the polemics that were fought in the *Levensbode*, and see whether Sassen's assessment of the sorry state of nineteenth-century philosophy in the Netherlands is warranted. To begin with, Van Vloten's particular interpretation of Spinozism is a fine example of what should perhaps be considered a dialectical twist of history, for it would seem that Van Vloten from the 1840s onwards was attracted precisely to the atheist and naturalist 'Spinoza' whose views had been rejected equally emphatically by the large majority of his own contemporaries. According to Van Vloten, the *E* had always been decried precisely on account of its unmitigated *modernity*, but only now, he felt, the time had come to implement the truly *scientific* thrust of Spinoza's naturalism, and Van Vloten actually went so far as to add to his Leiden dissertation (in theology) the famous proposition V, 24 of the *E*: 'Quo magis res singulares intelligimus,

⁸ Mees-Verwey, *De betekenis van Johannes van Vloten*, 200.

⁹ Van Vloten, 'Spinoza de blijde boedschapper der mondige mensheid.'

eo magis Deum intelligimus.¹⁰ In this respect, van Vloten revealed his affinity to the eighteenth-century French ‘neo-Spinozists’, who traditionally have been dealt with rather harshly by historians of Spinozism, including Paul Vernière, who insisted on the ‘poor grasp’ of Spinozism among many pre-Revolutionary *philosophes*. At the end of his classic study on Spinoza and eighteenth-century French philosophy, Vernière summarized his approach as follows:

Un principe efficace nous a guidé: l'influence réelle d'une doctrine et la fermentation intellectuelle qu'elle provoque ne dépendent pas de sa rigidité dogmatique, mais très souvent de sa désintégration. (...) La vie d'une doctrine et son efficacité exigent peut-être l'incompréhension, le remaniement, le brassage. L'orthodoxie en philosophie est germe de mort.¹¹

But this seems to imply that it is possible to identify an ‘ideal’ Spinozism throughout the ages. Moreover, it would appear that from the late seventeenth century onwards there have always been highly diverse ways of reading Spinoza, and in all fairness, the past few decades of Spinoza scholarship have witnessed a particular flowering of research into the ‘materialist’ interpretations of Spinoza’s philosophy—witness for instance the work being done under the aegis of Olivier Bloch and Antony McKenna on so-called clandestine manuscripts.¹² (A particularly fine example has been supplied by Pierre-François Moreau, who has recently pointed to the originality as well as profundity of the *Doutes de la religion*, a ‘Spinozist’ clandestine manuscript, wrongly attributed to Boulainvilliers and published in 1767 in London by d’Holbach).¹³

Does this also mean that, perhaps, Van Vloten has been underestimated as a Spinozist? His main book, *Baruch d’Espinoza*, was published in 1862.¹⁴ Dedicated to the great Dutch materialist philosopher and biologist Jacobus Moleschott (1822–1893),¹⁵ it clearly bears witness to Van Vloten’s

¹⁰ Mees-Verwey, *De betekenis van Johannes van Vloten*, 201.

¹¹ Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 700–701. Recently, a comprehensive, alternative interpretation has become available: Citton, *L’Envers de la liberté*.

¹² See for example Bloch (ed.), *Le Matérialisme du XVIII^e siècle* and *Spinoza au XVIII^e siècle*; McKenna, ‘Spinoza in Clandestine Manuscripts’ and ‘Les manuscrits clandestins philosophiques’.

¹³ Moreau, ‘Rezeption und Transformation des Spinozismus’. See also Métraux, ‘Über Denis Diderots physiologisch interpretierten Spinoza’; Hindrichs, ‘Substanz und Materie’.

¹⁴ Van Vloten, *Baruch d’Espinoza*. Van Vloten’s list of publications counts almost sixty *spinozana*. See Mees-Verwey, *De betekenis van Johannes van Vloten*, 253–257.

¹⁵ See Gregory, *Scientific Materialism*, 80–99; Moleschott, *De eenheid van het leven*; Thissen, ‘Een voorbeeld voor prille atheïsten’.

polemical, essentially literary stance. Even in 1880, at the official inauguration of Spinoza's statue in the Hague, Van Vloten thought nothing of continuing his many quarrels, which he appears to have enjoyed considerably. In his *Baruch d'Espinoza* he deliberately drew attention to the conflicts in Spinoza's own life, and more in particular to Spinoza's repeated clashes with religious authority and theological 'prejudice'. Thus, Van Vloten concentrated on Spinoza's excommunication, and on such critical correspondents as Albert Burgh, Willem van Blijenbergh, Lambertus van Velthuysen and Hugo Boxel. As a result, Spinoza's attitude towards the Catholic Church, the authority of Scripture, atheism, and the supernatural take center stage in Van Vloten's monograph. Spinoza's Mennonite friends, on the other hand, such as Balling, Jelles and De Vries, are hardly mentioned. Instead, Van Vloten points to the success enjoyed by Descartes in the Dutch Republic, and according to Van Vloten any properly philosophical assessment of Spinozism should take its cue from a comparison with Cartesianism.

To Van Vloten's mind, Descartes' thought was as brilliant as it was restricted to the analysis of what he coined 'the head', whereas Spinoza had succeeded in thinking through all of man, including his 'heart'. By insisting on the omnipotence of reason and by his absolute loyalty to the truth Spinoza, or so Van Vloten argued, was a genuine philosopher, and this became evident as early as the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, where he proved his mettle, concluding that:

the truth does not contradict the truth, nor can Scripture teach such nonsense as is commonly supposed. For if we were to discover in it anything that would be contrary to the natural light, we could refute it with the same freedom which we employ when we refute the Koran and the Talmud.¹⁶

Indeed, Van Vloten insisted, the earliest known statement made by Spinoza on the aims of his philosophy confirms this attitude, for the famous introduction to the *TIE*, leading up to the conclusion that for the philosopher real happiness can only be found in the understanding of 'the connection of things', is not based on any 'abstract metaphysics', but on the accurate observation of particular objects ('nauwlettende kennisneming der bijzondere dingen'). Thus, Van Vloten argued, Spinozism combines an empiricist exactitude with the rigour of deductive rationalism.¹⁷

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 331.

¹⁷ Van Vloten, *Baruch d'Espinoza*, 86.

Van Vloten's account of Spinoza's philosophical output comes down to an almost verbatim rephrasing of large parts of the latter's *Opera*. The Preface to the *TPP* is quoted in its entirety as are crucial parts of the *E*. In fact, Van Vloten's chef d'oeuvre comes close to being a voluminous 'Selected Writings'—of Spinoza, that is.¹⁸ Faced with the question how to make sense of the notoriously difficult closing propositions of the *E*, Van Vloten had little to hide: here we are indeed, he mused, staring 'into the abyss of mysticism'.¹⁹ As a consequence, he simply 'rejects' both *E*, V, 32 and 33—'Whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge we take pleasure in, and our pleasure is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause' and 'The intellectual love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, is eternal.' The only interpretation able to make sense of these propositions, or so so Van Vloten argued, replaces 'God' by 'Life', that is by our 'modal' existence among an infinite number of other finite modes. *E*, V, 35 and 36, according to which God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love and the mind's intellectual love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself, can only signify that we are able to experience immense joy by learning to understand the causal network we ourselves are part of, and call the world.²⁰

Perhaps one of the most revealing aspects of Van Vloten's campaign to have Spinozism recognised as a pre-eminently modern world view, able to accommodate the latest achievements of the natural sciences, is the curious fact that *Baruch d'Espinoza* only started to elicit any reactions after the publication of its second edition, in 1871. By this time Van Vloten had left Deventer, and as the champion of *De Levensbode* he actually appears to have been on the lookout for opponents, whom he finally found among the Dutch Kantians of the time, for it would be Cornelis Bellaar Spruyt (1842–1901) who at last took up the gauntlet. Bellaar Spruyt was a young physicist and future Professor of Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, who in 1871 had published three separate essays on the limits of our experience, criticising the 'naïve' empiricism held by Comte and the popular philosopher and theologian of Utrecht University, Cornelis Opzoomer (1821–1891).²¹ In particular Bellaar Spruyt's plea in favour of an 'intuitive'

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 220–390.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 378.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 381.

²¹ Bellaar Spruyt, 'Het algemeene postulaat van Herbert Spencer'; 'Aangeboren waarnemingsvormen'. See Sassen, *Geschiedenis van de wijsbegeerte*, 332–333 and 369 ff.; Opzoomer, *Het wezen der kennis*.

notion of causality, which he had borrowed from Schopenhauer, as well as his Kantian conception of the apriori nature of time and space provoked a violent reaction from Opzoomer.²² More interestingly for our purposes, however, Van Vloten seized the opportunity to hijack this ensuing debate between a Kantian and an empiricist by writing a reply of his own to Bellaar Spruyt's second essay, in which Bellaar Spruyt had been so bold as to refer, albeit in passing, to Spinoza: just as the seventeenth century, he had written, had been mistaken in rejecting Spinoza, 'our' century should not be so careless as to ignore Kant's and Schopenhauer's criticism of empiricism.²³ It goes without saying that Van Vloten felt this to be a blatantly ridiculous if not downright sacrilegious remark.²⁴

At first Bellaar Spruyt seems to have ignored Van Vloten's pretty vitriolic intervention, concentrating instead on his polemic with Opzoomer.²⁵ But in 1875 he finally took the bait and wrote a late but detailed review of the second edition of Van Vloten's *Baruch d'Espinoza* which he rather haughtily characterised as 'an anachronism'.²⁶ According to Bellaar Spruyt, German nineteenth-century philosophers had long been cured of their fanatical reverence for Spinoza after they had started to actually read the man's work. In England and France today, Bellaar Spruyt added, nobody mentions Spinoza any longer either. Spinozism should therefore be dismissed as 'old hat', Bellaar Spruyt concluded, and this turned Van Vloten into a 'stranger' in his own century.²⁷ Van Vloten had simply failed to comprehend the historical context from which Spinozism had emerged, Bellaar Spruyt continued his lecture: apparently, Van Vloten was unable to perceive that the true philosophical revolution brought about in the seventeenth century had been Descartes'. Not that this mattered greatly, for Descartes had overestimated the importance of both mathematics and metaphysics, but as a consequence the mathematical metaphysics spawned by Spinoza had been mistaken a fortiori. Moreover, Van Vloten had failed to clarify such Spinozist delusions as the notion that it is possible to deduce existence from an idea as well as the perfectly obscure

²² Opzoomer, *Een nieuwe kritiek der wijsbegeerte*.

²³ Bellaar Spruyt, 'Aangeboren waarnemingsvormen', 1–68. Compare his attack on Van der Wijck: *De laatste gedaanteverwisseling*.

²⁴ Van Vloten, 'Dr Spruyt en Spinoza'.

²⁵ Bellaar Spruyt, 'De achterhoede van het idealisme'.

²⁶ Bellaar Spruyt, 'Een anachronisme'. The same text was published separately: *Van Vloten's Benedictus de Spinoza beoordeeld*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

distinction between absolute and relative or conditional infinity.²⁸ As if this were not enough, Bellaar Spruyt went on to launch a devastating critique of Van Vloten's identification of 'the eternal and infinite connection of things' with 'God' as *ens perfectissimum*:²⁹ in the end neither Spinoza nor Van Vloten are able to account for the reality of evil, and reducing evil to the absence of good inevitably leads to the fatal incoherence evident from the *TPP*, in which Spinoza was forced to admit that 'right' and 'power' are essentially identical.³⁰ While Bellaar Spruyt agreed with Van Vloten on the modernity of determinism, monism and materialism, he completely rejected the latter's portrayal of Spinoza as a precursor of the scientific method and of 'modern unbelief': 'today's philosophical atheists', Bellaar Spruyt observed, simply lack Spinoza's 'joyous optimism'.³¹

It did not take Van Vloten long to respond and he really made an effort to make it look as if he was furious. But by this time he was also extremely busy organising the memorial festivities due in 1877, while the fund raising for the The Hague statue was also becoming a major source of concern, so for the moment he only published a brief reply in which he made minced meat of any attempt to force upon him a literal interpretation of the *E*: loyal to the 'spirit' of Spinoza, this book actually inspired me to abandon a priori metaphysics and to pursue the study of Nature, he insisted.³² Shortly after having replied to Bellaar Spruyt, Van Vloten was only too glad to acknowledge that he shared his personal admiration for Spinoza with Renan, for instance, whose address, held at The Hague in 1877, he cherished.³³ And he was equally content with the efforts of J.P.N. Land, with whom he would cooperate in publishing Spinoza's *Opera*,³⁴ and of the physician and philosopher H.J. Betz (1842–1905),³⁵ with whom he had already started collaborating in editing *De Levensbode*. It goes without saying that Van Vloten was especially appreciative of Betz's attack on

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52 ff. and 226 ff.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

³² Van Vloten, 'Robertus Nurks en Spinoza'.

³³ Van Vloten, 'De Tweehonderdjarige gedachtenisvierung van Spinoza's sterfdag'. See Renan, *Spinoza*; Tielrooy, *Ernest Renan*; De Vet, 'Renan and the Netherlands'. As early as 1859 Van Vloten had discussed Renan: 'Renans denkbeelden'. See also his 'Scholten en Opzoomer over Renan'.

³⁴ Spinoza, *Opera*, eds. Van Vloten and Land.

³⁵ Van Vloten, 'Toenemende Spinoza-waardering' discusses amongst others: Land, *Ter gedachtenis aan Spinoza* and Betz, *Spinoza en de vrijheid*. Van Vloten made fun of Van der Wijck, *Spinoza*, in: 'Prof Jhr. Van der Wijcks Spinoza'.

Bellaar Spruyt.³⁶ As far as Kantianism was concerned, however, Van Vloten remained adamant: to his mind Kant's philosophy was the sorry product of artificial sophistries, perfectly irrelevant to the real aim of True Philosophy: the emancipation of man.³⁷

Thus, in a very real sense, Van Vloten continued a steady tradition of Dutch scepticism as regards Kant's 'transcendental' or 'critical' philosophy. Despite the efforts of a small number of early admirers, such as most notably Paulus van Hemert (1756–1825) and Johannes Kinker (1764–1845), in particular Dutch academics remained highly sceptical of Kant's thought. Indeed, until the end of the nineteenth century, German Idealism had remarkably little impact on the practice of philosophy in the Netherlands.³⁸ Bellaar Spruyt, to put it differently, was hardly representative of any established 'orthodoxy', and Opzoomer's empiricism, which had served as Van Vloten's own point of departure, was far more popular than Kant's idealism ever had been in the Netherlands, as was confirmed by the intervention of one M.C.L. Lotsy (1845–1910), a lawyer, who seized upon Van Vloten's Spinozism in order to launch a highly ambitious but pretty confused attack on German philosophy as such.³⁹ The only recent German philosopher who made any sense to him was Schopenhauer, precisely because he had brilliantly demonstrated Kant's countless insufficiencies.⁴⁰ Van Vloten was particularly pleased with Lotsy's support for Spinoza's determinism,⁴¹ while Bellaar Spruyt, who in 1877 has been appointed to a chair in Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, reacted with a final essay on the shortcomings of Spinozism by characterising Lotsy's position as proceeding *per fidem ad intellectum*: only by believing in the beauty of monism, he argued, is it possible to comprehend Spinoza, while true Philosophy does not hold any articles of faith.⁴²

By the time Van Vloten managed at last to have his beloved statue unveiled in The Hague, the original debate regarding Spinoza's modernity had lost its original urgency. Curiously, once Bellaar Spruyt had been

³⁶ Betz, *Levenschets van Baruch de Spinoza* and 'Over de aard onzer kennis'.

³⁷ Van Vloten, 'Jong-Hollandsche Wijsbegeerte'.

³⁸ Sassen, *Geschiedenis van de wijsbegeerte*, 269 ff. and *Wijsgerig leven in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw*; Wielema, 'Die erste niederländische Kant-Rezeption'; Van Hemert, *Gezag en grenzen van de menselijke rede*; Guépin, *Het humanisme*, 105 ff.

³⁹ Lotsy, *Spinoza's wijsbegeerte*, 68–69 et 127–128.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴¹ Van Vloten, 'Spinoza als ervaringswijsgeer'. In addition he responded to H. Koekebakker, 'De ontroning van het gemoed door een vertoornd Spinozist' in his 'Modern-kristelijck misverstand omtreent Lotsy's Spinoza'.

⁴² Bellaar Spruyt, 'Een nieuw pleidooi voor het monisme', 270.

offered a university chair in Philosophy, he seemed to have lost interest in the subject: as secretary to the Dutch South Africa Society he was mainly active raising support for his 'brethren' in the Boer War. It should be added, though, that by the end of his career he showed remarkable generosity, when in 1890 he published an article in the *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* entitled 'Die Geschichte der Philosophie in Holland von 1878 bis 1888', in which he lavishly praised both Van Vloten and Betz on account of their gallant efforts in promoting Spinozism.⁴³ It had also become easy to be generous and admit that Van Vloten had made a difference, for van Vloten had died in 1883 and in the meantime both his disciples, Betz and Lotsy, had developed into increasingly independent thinkers. In 1876 and 1877, in a critique of the Reformed theologian J.H. Gunning (1829–1905), who had just published a book of his own on Spinoza, Betz had still acted very much in Van Vloten's spirit.⁴⁴ Betz 'the younger' had regarded Spinoza as an essentially Dutch freethinker, for the entire history of the Dutch bore witness to their indomitable desire for liberty.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Betz had never called Spinoza a 'naturalist', for he had always been bothered by the fact that Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* consisted of more attributes than Extension alone. In addition, he now rejected attempts to reduce Nature to the infinite connection of natural objects, preferring instead to consider Nature as the ground ('grond') of *all* modes, including those unknown to man.⁴⁶ Moreover, Betz reminded his readers, to Spinoza Nature is *natura naturans* as well as *natura naturata*.⁴⁷

Next, Betz even came to a rather balanced assessment of the epistemological objections hurled at Van Vloten by Bellaar Spruyt: it is true, he admitted, 'our empiricism' is fundamentally at odds with Spinoza's rationalism in that we start by studying the behaviour of particular modes, whereas Spinoza deduces reality from an absolutely general concept. Despite this fundamental difference, we are in full agreement, Betz continued, as far as the truth of both monism and determinism is concerned, and empiricists and Spinozists also agree on the unity of body and mind.⁴⁸

⁴³ By this time Bellaar Spruyt seemed to have lost all interest in Spinozism. See his *Het empiriocriticisme*.

⁴⁴ Gunning, *Spinoza en de idee van de persoonlijkheid*; Betz, *Levensschets van Baruch de Spinoza* and *Spinoza en de vrijheid*. See also Van Vloten, 'Gemoedelijke Spinoza-bestrijding'.

⁴⁵ Betz, *Levensschets van Baruch de Spinoza*, 5 ff.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁷ Betz, *Spinoza en de vrijheid*, 28–29.

⁴⁸ Betz, *Levensschets van Baruch de Spinoza*, 97–102.

Still, Betz wondered, what are we to make of the undeniable fact that Spinoza's metaphysics seems to deny all access to any attributes except Thought and Extension?⁴⁹ This question would continue to haunt Betz, and in 1883 he was finally prepared to consider the possibility that perhaps Kant's work was not entirely useless, for when all is said and done, Betz wrote, it was Kant who taught us that it is impossible to deduce the real from the ideal. And the only way to make sense of the Spinozist antinomy, resulting from the supposition that there must be infinitely many unknown attributes constituting a perfectly intelligible God, is by admitting that there is indeed an ultimate incoherence in Spinoza's metaphysics resulting from its fatal combination of a deductive style of reasoning with its inductive contents.⁵⁰ This in no way implies that Kant has somehow taken Spinoza's place, Betz hastened to add, because the strength of Spinozism does not reside in its metaphysics, but on the contrary in its destruction of metaphysics as such. As a consequence, the 'mission' of today's Spinozism should not be the 'repair' of its metaphysics, but a return to its true aims. Betz was happy to cite Sir Frederick Pollock: 'The strength of Spinozism is not in the system as such, but in its method and habit of mind.'⁵¹

Meanwhile, Van Vloten had also reconsidered the Kantian critique of Spinoza's 'dogmatic' metaphysics, and just before he died he emphasised once more the implicit destruction of metaphysics as such in Spinoza's philosophy; again, he drove home the point that Kantians were in no position to criticise the way in which Spinoza deduced the existence of substance from its concept, as long as they themselves clung to the existence of such a hazy entity as 'das Ding an sich'.⁵² But van Vloten's later writings lack the force of his early essays.⁵³ And although Lotsy continued to do battle with Bellaar Spruyt, obviously for increasingly personal reasons,⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Betz, *Spinoza en de vrijheid*, 33.

⁵⁰ Betz, *Spinoza en Kant*, 44–45. See also his *Ervaringswijsbegeerte* as well as Van Vloten's review: 'Ervaringswijsbegeerte'.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 47, borrowed from Pollock, *Spinoza*, 374. Pollock was praised repeatedly by Van Vloten. See Van Vloten, 'Engelsche Spinoza-waardeering'. Cf. Van Vloten, 'De wetenschappelijke aard van Spinoza's wijsbegeerte', review of Pollock, 'The Scientific Character of Spinoza's Philosophy'.

⁵² Van Vloten, 'Kantiaansch misverstand'.

⁵³ See the small and largely redundant polemics in *De Humanist*, successor to *De Levensbode*: Van Vloten, 'Spinoza's zoogenoemd bovennatuurlijke grondslag'; Lotsy, 'Iets over "gevoel" en "rede"', and finally: Van Vloten, 'De opbouwende aard van het spinozisme'.

⁵⁴ Lotsy, *Het vraagstuk van den zedelijken vooruitgang*; Bellaar Spruyt, 'Wetenschap of Phantasie'; Lotsy, 'Wetenschappelijke groothedswaanzin'.

Betz appears to have completely forgotten about Spinozism: during the 1880s and 1890s he published several brochures on spiritualism, political issues and education, but the only philosopher he was to mention in these later texts was, in fact, Kant.⁵⁵ In all fairness, even the most dedicated admirers of Van Vloten must have frowned upon the way in which he pursued his debate with Bellaar Spruyt: in 1879, Bellaar Spruyt had published a small and modest study of the history of innate ideas, which was so aggressively reviewed by Van Vloten that a proper discussion was no longer possible. Van Vloten not only called his adversary myopic, superficial, evil, and stupid, but he also allowed himself to wander off in a bewildering variety of digressions that were obviously and completely besides the point at issue. His complaints to the effect that nobody took the trouble to read his own work on Spinoza revealed him as having become a rancorous old man who by the end of his life must have realised that in the Netherlands the first properly philosophical debate on the merits of Spinozism had now come full circle. It had ended where it had started: with a debate on Kant's 'critical' epistemology.⁵⁶ One could even wonder whether in the long run, Van Vloten's intervention did not actually serve to further the cause of Kantianism in the Netherlands, especially among academics such as Bellaar Spruyt.

It would be too easy, however, to conclude that Van Vloten's efforts ended in failure, and it would be equally facile to discard his polemics as mediocre on account of his insistence on Spinoza's determinism, monism, and atheism. His particular interpretation of Spinozism clearly comes remarkably close to the trends which have dominated Spinoza scholarship during the past few decades. While it is true that the exchange with Bellaar Spruyt ended in a stalemate, it should be borne in mind that Van Vloten never had a real interest in the technical details of epistemology. His own concerns were of an essentially moral and anthropological nature in that, more than a century before Jonathan Israel's work, he turned Spinoza into a herald of the Enlightenment: to him Spinoza was first and foremost the champion of the emancipation of man. And although he repeatedly affirmed the internal coherence of the system delivered in

⁵⁵ See Betz, *Een en ander*, 145–149, on Rudolf Carel d'Ablaing van Giessenburg's atheism. D'Ablaing van Giessenburg (1826–1904), the illegitimate son of a baron and his half-sister, was a well known freethinker and the first editor of the complete works of Jean Meslier.

⁵⁶ Bellaar Spruyt, *Proeve van een geschiedenis*; Van Vloten, 'Kortzichtige wijsbegeerte'. Cf. his 'Spinoza als ervaringswijsgeer'.

the *E*,⁵⁷ he never made a secret of his ambition to propagate a ‘purified’ ('gelouterd') Spinozism.⁵⁸ Thus, Johannes van Vloten remained loyal to what Pollock had dubbed the ‘spirit’ of Spinozism, and he would have been delighted with Pierre Macherey’s more recent attempt to come to terms with the question of what it actually means to be a ‘Spinozist’:

être spinoziste (...) n'est certainement pas proclamer, et prétendre justifier, l'adhésion à un ensemble d'idées dont la figure serait parfaitement délimitée et close. Mais c'est plutôt se laisser prendre, et comme aspirer, par l'ouverture d'une rationalité, d'une puissance intellectuelle, perpétuellement ouverte, qui trouve son adéquation en s'identifiant au mouvement de la réalité (...)⁵⁹

2. Low Ebb

During the first half of the twentieth century, Dutch Spinozism continued to attract attention, but it was largely owing to the members of the Vereniging Het Spinozahuis, the society that in 1897 had managed to purchase the Rijnsburg house where Spinoza had once lived, that at least some publications on Spinoza continued to appear. In particular Willem Meijer (1842–1926) and W.G. van der Tak (1885–1958), successive secretaries to Het Spinozahuis, produced a number of fine studies, and then there was the unfortunate figure of J.H. Carp (1893–1979), a dedicated fascist as well as a Spinozist,⁶⁰ but it would seem that before World War II interest in Spinoza remained largely restricted to laymen looking for a secular world view sophisticated enough to compete with the various theological as well as political orthodoxies of the time, and during the first decades immediately following the war even Het Spinozahuis was dwindling and Dutch Spinozism was at a low ebb. Henri Krop will shortly publish a full study of the history of Dutch Spinozism, and he will deal in detail with Spinoza’s early twentieth-century admirers, so here I prefer to concentrate on what Sassen termed the third phase of Dutch Spinozism.

In the mid 1960s Ferdinand Sassen (1894–1971), professor of the history of philosophy at Leiden university, wrote a short essay for *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on post-war Dutch Philosophy. Sassen had devoted most of his

⁵⁷ Van Vloten, *Baruch d'Espinoza*, 388–390.

⁵⁸ Van Vloten, ‘Robertus Nurks en Spinoza’, 152.

⁵⁹ Macherey, *Avec Spinoza*, 31.

⁶⁰ See Thissen, *De spinozisten*, Chapters 8–10; Krop, ‘Filosofie als levensleer’.

working life to the history of philosophy in the Netherlands, so he was in an excellent position to comment. According to Sassen, the Second World War had completely altered Dutch philosophy. Schools of thought that had flourished before the war, such as neo-Thomism, neo-Kantianism and neo-Hegelianism, had withered almost completely. After 1945, 'modern' philosophers opted for Existentialism, Phenomenology or Logical Positivism; 'and Spinozism', according to Sassen, 'vanished from the philosophical scene'.⁶¹ In 1971, however, only a few years after having written his essay for *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Sassen called attention to a remarkable phenomenon: the *revival* of Spinozism in the Netherlands. In a short review, written for the *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* of Van der Bend's dissertation on Bierens de Haan's Spinozism, Sassen noted a spectacular and very recent *comeback* of Spinozism among Dutch philosophers:

To the extent that we can distinguish a 'Dutch Spinozism', it would seem that now, after the 'propagandistic' period of the nineteenth century (Van Vloten, Betz) and the 'wereldbeschouwelijke' of the early twentieth century (Meyer, Carp, Van der Tak), with all its inherent contradictions, a 'scholarly' period has arrived.⁶²

Sassen pointed to the dissertations written by Hubbeling in 1964 and De Deugd in 1966, and he could have pointed to Van der Wal's dissertation of 1968.⁶³ Bibliometrical data clearly support Sassen's findings, for *Poortmans Repertorium der Nederlandse wijsbegeerte* indicates that from 1948 to 1957 only 22 publications in Dutch had appeared on Spinoza, and from 1958 to 1967 a mere 29.⁶⁴ From 1968 to 1977, however, the year in which Spinoza's death was commemorated across the Western world, 89 Dutch books and articles were published on Spinoza.⁶⁵ The publication, in 1977, with the popular publishing house 'De Wereldbibliotheek', of the first part of the *Werken van B. de Spinoza*⁶⁶ signalled a true renaissance of Dutch Spinoza scholarship. The celebrated series of lectures issued by the Dutch

⁶¹ Sassen, 'Dutch Philosophy', 442, quoted in Klever, 'Cijfers en hun betekenis', 183.

⁶² Sassen, review of Van der Bend, *Het spinozisme van Dr. J.D. Bierens de Haan*, *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* 63 (1971), 281–282. See also Sassen, *Wijsgerig leven in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw*, 85–99. The Dutch word 'wereldbeschouwelijk' is almost impossible to translate into English. It refers to a non-academic 'philosophical' view of the world that also includes religious perspectives.

⁶³ Hubbeling, *Spinoza's Methodology*; De Deugd, *The Significance of Spinoza's First Kind of Knowledge*; Van der Wal, *Wereldbeschouwelijk denken als filosofisch probleem*, 72–102.

⁶⁴ Klever, 'Cijfers en hun betekenis', 185.

⁶⁵ Klever and Bremmer, *Poortmans Repertorium der Nederlandse wijsbegeerte, Deel IV*.

⁶⁶ Spinoza, *Briefwisseling*.

Spinoza Society also confirms this picture. From 1946 to 1966 only 15 issues of the *Mededelingen vanwege Het Spinozahuis* appeared, but from 1967 to 1986 26 *Mededelingen* came out and from 1987 to 2000 another 28 issues followed. The large membership of the Vereniging Het Spinozahuis—over the past few decades it has grown to nearly 1200, making it by far the largest philosophical society in the Netherlands, seems to suggest that Spinoza has become a figure able to draw an audience consisting mainly of interested laymen.

If we take a closer look at the two journals which have traditionally served the Dutch-speaking world of academic philosophers, Sassen's recognition of a revival of 'scholarly' Spinozism in the 1960s is amply confirmed. In 1946, the *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* (ANTW) was re-founded by some of the leading philosophers of the day, including E.W. Beth (1908–1964), H.J. Pos (1898–1955), H. Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) and K. Kuypers (1905–1986). Soon they were joined by a new generation of up and coming philosophers such as B. Delfgaauw (1912–1993), C.A. van Peursen (1920–1996) and G. Nuchelmans (1922–1996). They addressed Existentialism, were interested in Phenomenology and in what at the time was called 'scientific philosophy'—more or less in the manner analysed by Sassen. The post-war ANTW also contained a substantial amount of studies on the history of philosophy: in particular Plato, Descartes, Leibniz and Berkeley enjoyed considerable attention. Spinoza, however, was hardly ever mentioned. In 1954 Pos wrote a review of Paul Vernière's *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution*, in 1963 the publication of Siegfried Hessing's *Spinoza—300 Jahre Ewigkeit* was noted, and the following year Hubbeling's dissertation was reviewed—quite critically, it should be added. Five years later, in 1969, Hubbeling joined the editorial board, and it was only from this moment onward that, slowly, things began to change. That same year, the first post-war article on Spinoza was published in the ANTW—Van der Bend on Schleiermacher and Spinoza.⁶⁷ It was not until 1974 that the most important Dutch journal of philosophy actually printed a paper completely devoted to Spinoza. Irony has it that the author was a young Belgian philosopher, who had submitted an article on the *TIE*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Van der Bend, 'Schleiermachers Reden über die Religion en Spinoza'.

⁶⁸ De Dijn, 'The Significance of Spinoza's *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding*'.

Meanwhile, the foremost Flemish journal of philosophy, entitled *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, displayed a very similar lack of interest, although it occasionally revealed dissatisfaction with this state of affairs. As early as 1948, the Louvain professor of philosophy A. de Vos ended a review article on some recent studies on the history of modern philosophy complaining about the absence of a 'short but good' book on Spinoza. According to De Vos, there was a genuine need for such a book.⁶⁹ Apart from some isolated reviews, De Vos' complaints appear to have fallen on deaf ears.⁷⁰ Only in 1962 the *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* contained a short article, written by M. Würzner, on the Dutch eighteenth-century professor of philosophy Bernard Nieuhoff and Spinoza.⁷¹

It could be argued that the lack of interest in Spinoza in post-war Flanders was related to the dominant position held by the Catholic clergy: bibliographic research has demonstrated that in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium between 1939 and 1964 three quarters of all philosophical publications were produced by clergymen.⁷² This much is clear, however, that in the years following World War II, the *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* closely resembled the *ANTW*. Young philosophers from the Netherlands such as Delfgaauw and Van Peursen regularly contributed to the *Tijdschrift* of their Flemish colleagues, just as some of the senior Dutch philosophers did: in 1951 the famous Utrecht philosopher and psychologist F.J.J. Buytendijk (1887–1974) published a phenomenological analysis of the game of football.⁷³ The main difference between the two journals concerned the steady stream of neo-Thomistic studies in the Flemish *Tijdschrift* as well as its complete silence on what would come to be known as 'analytical philosophy'. The editors must have felt this lacuna had to be filled one way or another, so in the third issue of volume 28 (1966) a deliberate attempt was made to raise awareness of some the recent developments in the 'Anglosaxon' domain, but for our purposes this issue is more interesting on account of the short review it contained of a monograph on Spinoza by Huib Hubbeling. One 'H. de Dijn, M.A.', working at Louvain on a dissertation of his own, ended his piece by underlining how welcome

⁶⁹ *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 10 (1948), 362. Apparently, Sikkes' book *Spinoza. Leer en leven* made little impression. It hardly left a trace in later studies.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 11 (1949), 447–466, where Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, is reviewed. In *ibid.*, 18 (1956), 287–288 a review was published of a German translation of the *E* (Hamburg, 1955 (1949)).

⁷¹ Würzner, 'Bernard Nieuhoff en zijn beoordeling van het spinozisme'.

⁷² De Brie, 'Het filosoferen in het Nederlands taalgebied'.

⁷³ Buytendijk, 'Het voetballen'.

and how timely Hubbeling's introduction to Spinoza was in particular in Belgium and the Netherlands.

At last, or so it would seem, De Vos' complaint of 1948 was heard, and just as Hubbeling would turn the *ANTW* into a platform for a long series of papers on Spinoza, De Dijn would soon play a very similar role in the *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*. As early as 1967, the young PhD student published a paper of his own on Spinoza as well as several reviews of recent work done on Spinoza.⁷⁴ The following years De Dijn would add many other papers, and Van der Bend, Wim Klever, Frank Mertens and Jan de Vet would follow suit. Of particular importance were the many reviews De Dijn contributed of countless major studies on Spinoza published abroad: in 1972, for instance, he composed a long 'Kroniek van de Spinozaliteratuur 1960–1970'.⁷⁵ De Dijn left the board of the *Tijdschrift* several years ago, but unlike the *ANTW* it serves to this day as a regular outlet for Dutch articles on Spinoza. From the 1970s, meanwhile, Dutch-speaking experts started publishing increasingly in foreign journals and edited volumes as well. The Rotterdam philosopher Wim Klever made some twenty contributions to the first ten issues of *Studia Spinozana* (1985–1994) alone and Herman de Dijn published a major monograph in the United States.⁷⁶ Looking back, today it has become difficult to imagine that, not that long ago, Sassen had to observe that in the Netherlands after World War II 'Spinozism vanished from the philosophical scene.'

3. *The Return of Spinoza*

The return of Spinoza in the Netherlands and the rise of a 'scholarly' Dutch Spinozism from the late 1960s onwards says little if anything about the philosophical impact Spinoza's views have had on recent Dutch philosophy. Of course it is always difficult to assess Spinoza's or any other historical philosopher's 'influence' on any given community of professional academics. As far as the post-war Netherlands and Belgium are concerned, the added difficulty stems from the virtual absence of reliable research into their philosophical history. The little that has been done is

⁷⁴ De Dijn, 'Over de interpretatie van de Schrift volgens Spinoza'. See also *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 29 (1967), 176–179, 396–398, 786–789 and 790–792.

⁷⁵ *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 34 (1972), 130–139.

⁷⁶ De Dijn, *Spinoza*.

concerned with the ‘societal relevance’ of the practice of philosophy.⁷⁷ So we will have to be cautious here, the more so since the large majority of Hubbeling’s and De Dijn’s publications on Spinoza dealt with his methodology, his concept of God, his moral psychology and his political theory. As a consequence their work is essentially exegetical and belongs first and foremost to the historiography of philosophy. What is more, clearly one of the most important aspects of Dutch Spinoza scholarship concerns the constitution of Spinoza’s Latin texts carried out by *philologists*. As such, it says nothing about Spinoza’s ‘presence’ in Dutch philosophy.⁷⁸ Much the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for Theo Zweerman’s celebrated analysis of the *TIE*⁷⁹ as well as for Dutch research into the seventeenth-century ‘circle’ of Spinoza and the early reception of his work.⁸⁰ The series of Dutch dissertations on the *TPP* is also of a largely exegetical and historiographical nature.⁸¹ The rise of a ‘scholarly’ Dutch Spinozism turned Spinoza and his work into an object of research rather than a source of philosophical inspiration, and as such it does not seem to have entailed a genuinely philosophical presence as identified by Pierre Macherey: ‘Restituer une véritable présence à la pensée de Spinoza’, Macherey has argued, ‘ce serait l’interpréter, au sens presque musical du terme, et par là rendre effective la charge créative qui est en elle, en lui donnant les moyens de se communiquer.’⁸²

Difficult as it may be to assess the impact Spinoza made on post-war philosophy in the Netherlands and Flanders, several Dutch-speaking Spinoza experts have nevertheless produced a substantial body of systematic work. What is more, despite the lack of research into post-war Dutch philosophy, we do have a number of sources at our disposal that at least convey a definite sense of its direction. An interesting example is supplied

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Duyvendak, ‘Godsdienst als het grootste kwaad’.

⁷⁸ Akkerman, *Studies in the Posthumous Works*; Steenbakkers, *Spinoza’s Ethica*.

⁷⁹ Zweerman, *L’Introduction à la philosophie selon Spinoza*.

⁸⁰ See, for instance, Akkerman and Hubbeling, ‘The Preface to Spinoza’s *Posthumous Works*'; Hubbeling, ‘Zur frühen Spinozarezeption in den Niederlanden'; Van Balen, *De verbeerting der gedachten*; Siebrand, *Spinoza and the Netherlanders*; Van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691)*; Duijkerius, *Het leven van Philopater*; Van Bunge and Klever (eds.), *Disguised and Overt Spinozism*. In this connection *Cahiers Spinoza* 6 (1991) should also be mentioned as well as Guido van Suchtelen’s work. As former secretary of Het Spinozahuis he also played a major part in the rejuvenation of Dutch Spinoza scholarship. Cf. De Deugd and Henrard, ‘Van Suchtelen over en met Spinoza’. Moreover, in 2000 Siebe Thissen’s excellent, Rotterdam dissertation appeared: *De spinozisten*. See, finally, also Wielema, *The March of the Libertines*.

⁸¹ Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice*; Terpstra, *De wending naar de politiek*; Blom, *Morality and Causality in Politics*; Roothaan, *Vroomheid, vrede en vrijheid*. See also Juffermans, *Drie perspectieven op religie* and (no dissertation) Verbeek, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*.

⁸² Macherey, ‘Spinoza au présent’, 12.

by a popular volume, edited by Fons Elders and published in 1968 on the eve of the post-war Spinoza revival, of in-depth interviews with several of the most distinguished Dutch philosophers of the time: *Filosofie als science fiction*. This generation of scholars was to dominate the Faculties of Philosophy established in 1970. ('Centrale Interfaculteiten' they were called: prior to this date no autonomous faculties of philosophy existed in the Netherlands.) In the 400 pages of philosophical conversation recorded in *Filosofie als science fiction*, Spinoza does not play any part.⁸³ A similar picture emerges from the five volumes edited by Frans Geraedts and Leonard de Jong, entitled *Ergo Cogito* (Groningen, 1988–1996): no less than fifty young philosophers, who together were quite representative of the first generation of Dutch philosophers trained by these newly established faculties, were asked to contribute a paper on an issue of particular concern to them. Not a single one of them demonstrated any particular interest in Spinoza. A third source on the general direction of philosophy in the Netherlands was supplied by the journalist Antoine Verbij who in 1995 put thirteen 'Big Questions' to eighteen well-known Dutch philosophers. Asked to identify the greatest philosopher who ever lived, they suggested twelve candidates, from Plato to Heidegger, but nobody cared to mention Spinoza, whose name did not figure anywhere in any of the answers given.⁸⁴

So it would seem that if Spinoza was of any significance at all to post-war Dutch and Flemish philosophy, the best place to look for evidence of his presence is the systematic work done by Huib Hubbeling, Herman de Dijn, and Wim Klever, the three main protagonists of Dutch-speaking 'scholarly' Spinozism. Their sympathy for Spinoza is beyond dispute and to them Spinoza was more than just another object of research. In their own philosophical work the exegetics are part of an autonomous philosophical ambition.

4. *Hubbeling, De Dijn, Klever*

Starting with Hubbeling, a former protestant minister who from 1967 to his untimely death in 1986 was professor of philosophy at the university of Groningen, it is difficult not to be struck by the limited impact

⁸³ Elders (ed.), *Filosofie als science-fiction*. On page 239 R.C. Kwant calls Spinoza one of 'the great creative geniuses opening new perspectives'; on page 297 C.W. Mönnich declares that he prefers Leibniz to Spinoza.

⁸⁴ Verbij, 'Het denken achter de dijken'.

Spinoza had on his own thought. The distance separating the two had already become evident in Hubbeling's dissertation of 1964, which had a highly original point of departure: Hubbeling's recognition of the tension felt in Spinoza's entire work between the latter's use of the deductive method and his nominalism.⁸⁵ One of Hubbeling's most important single books was entitled *Denkend geloven* (Believing and Thinking) of 1976. It was based on the conviction 'that every religious thesis can be defended philosophically'.⁸⁶ At first sight, Hubbeling appears to dispute Constantin Brunner's stance in the matter, but there can be little doubt that at the same time he was also questioning Spinoza's *TTP*, based as it is on the insight that theology and philosophy have to be sharply distinguished. Hubbeling went even further in his analysis of the arguments for and against theism and pantheism, a distinction which to his mind boiled down to the difference between a 'personal' and an 'impersonal' concept of God.⁸⁷ As early as his dissertation Hubbeling had noted that despite his admiration for Spinoza's 'methodological perspicuity and lucidity', he completely rejected his 'pantheist' notion of the deity.⁸⁸

Not that Hubbeling rejected pantheism in principle: once we are prepared to admit that two things are equal, we should leave open the possibility that one could serve as the 'ground' for the other. But according to Hubbeling it was impossible to rationally demonstrate that a single common ground should exist that shared its essence with all all other 'consequences'.⁸⁹ Instead, Hubbeling felt, a properly *religious* experience of the equality of all existing things offered a superior argument in favour of pantheism.⁹⁰ So according to Hubbeling in the absence of such an experience theism was to be rationally preferred over pantheism, and the way in which Spinoza had arrived at pantheism was the wrong one. Even on the rare occasions when he was ready to acknowledge a real kinship with Spinoza, he remained very cautious. Thus, in *Denkend geloven*, he referred to Spinoza in the context of his discussion of evil. Hubbeling felt God

⁸⁵ Hubbeling, *Spinoza's Methodology*, 82–83. Theo van der Werf, who succeeded Guido van Suchtelen as secretary to Het Spinozahuis, has composed an exhaustive bibliography of Hubbeling's work on Spinoza: 'List of Publications on Spinoza by H.G. Hubbeling'.

⁸⁶ Hubbeling, *Denkend geloven*, 76.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁸ Hubbeling, *Spinoza's Methodology*, 80. Cf Hubbeling, 'The Logical and Experiential Roots of Spinoza's Mysticism', 323: 'without being a Spinozist myself, I have great admiration for Spinoza'.

⁸⁹ Hubbeling, *Denkend geloven*, 88.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

would one day conquer evil since ‘good has more creative power than evil’.⁹¹ Because this insight presupposes, however, that God’s omnipotence is constrained by the rules of logic, Spinoza’s philosophy according to which the laws of logic are God’s thoughts, could perhaps be helpful here, and this, Hubbeling argued, could even be the case without embracing Spinoza’s ‘pantheism’.⁹² Again Hubbeling went out of his way not to be lured into a view of God he firmly rejected.

A similar ambiguity can be discerned in his posthumous *Principles of the Philosophy of Religion*—in part a translation of *Denkend geloven*. For in this book we are told that according to Spinoza ‘God expresses himself in the eternal truths (the logical and mathematical laws). They are God’s thoughts and reveal his being.’ And: ‘On this issue I take sides with Spinoza.’⁹³ For if God had been able to choose the laws of logic, Hubbeling continued, nothing would be certain, and God would run the risk of becoming the author of sin. Once more, the former minister emphasised that, on account of Spinoza’s rejection of the ‘analogy’ between the Creator and his creation, he could not be a Spinozist.⁹⁴

Despite Hubbeling’s sustained reticence on Spinoza’s naturalism, there is every reason to assume that by the end of his life he was prepared to reconsider his initial conviction that no Christian conception of the analogy between God and his creatures was able to accommodate Spinoza’s pantheism, for by the end of his life Hubbeling no longer felt that Spinoza actually was a pantheist. From a Spinozist point of view, he now believed, the world we live in is not part of God’s attributes but of his infinite modes, since *natura naturata*, made up of modes, is not identical to *natura naturans*, consisting of attributes: ‘So there certainly is a transcendent moment in Spinoza’s concept of God,’ Hubbeling concluded cheerfully.⁹⁵ Probably following Gueroult,⁹⁶ he termed Spinoza a ‘panentheist’, no doubt

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹³ Hubbeling, *Principles of the Philosophy of Religion*, 51. Cf. Hubbeling, ‘De studie van het spinozisme in Nederland’, 12–13: ‘I have also developed into a Spinozist direction. A few years ago, I studied the relationship between God and the eternal laws of logic. Are they created by God in the way Descartes felt that they were, or are they independent of God and is God subject to these laws in the way Leibniz felt He was. Both answers fail to satisfy. In my view the best solution regards them as an emanation out of God. After some reflection I have found out that this is Spinoza’s solution.’ See also Hubbeling, ‘Today’s Western Spinozism’, 9–10 and Van Suchtelen, ‘In Memoriam Hubertus Gesinus Hubbeling’.

⁹⁴ Hubbeling, *Principles of the Philosophy of Religion*, 148 and 198–200.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹⁶ Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, 220 ff.

inspired by his desire to bridge the gap separating his own, theistic, world-view from Spinoza's. As early as 1977 the ANTW had published a fascinating polemic between Hubbeling and De Dijn on the questions to what extent thought can be attributed to Spinoza's God, and whether he can be said to have self-consciousness.⁹⁷ De Dijn brought forward powerful arguments against both suggestions, based on the insight that according to the *E* God's infinite intellect, being an infinite mode of the attribute Thought, is part of *natura naturata* and not of *natura naturans*, and as a consequence does not belong to God's essence. Yet Hubbeling continued to insist that Spinoza was able 'to draw a close relationship between God and man: in his infinite mode, the *intellectus infinitus*, God thinks in "a human way"'.⁹⁸ As if Spinoza had recognised at least *some* analogy between God and man.

After Hubbeling's sudden death in 1986, De Dijn succeeded him as chair of the Dutch Spinoza Society. Together with A. Burms he published that same year *De rationaliteit en haar grenzen* (Rationality and its Limits), and subsequently, in 1993 and 1994, *Hoe overleven we de vrijheid?* (How to Survive Freedom?) en *Kan kennis troosten?* (Is Knowledge Able to Console?).⁹⁹ These titles alone inspire scepticism about the Spinozist orientation of De Dijn's own 'systematic' philosophy: did not Spinoza expound a full-fledged rationalism; did he not call freedom man's highest good; and was he not the author of an essentially intellectualist eschatology? Indeed, in *De rationaliteit en haar grenzen* Spinoza was put forward as one of the crown witnesses to the modern *Entzauberung der Welt*, which to De Dijn's mind has resulted in a disastrous loss of sense and meaning ('zinverlies').¹⁰⁰ The main authority quoted by De Dijn, however, is Wittgenstein, who also supplied De Dijn with the point of departure for *Kan kennis troosten?* De Dijn's analysis of 'the gap between knowing and living' is based on the insight that different forms of life and different cultural practices such as science and religion create their own constraints as well as their own meaning. Against Hubbeling, De Dijn joined Spinoza in his separation of philosophy from theology, so the continuing presence of Spinoza in the 'later' De Dijn should not cause surprise.

⁹⁷ Hubbeling, 'Heeft de God van Spinoza (zelf)bewustzijn?' and De Dijn, 'De God van Spinoza is geen persoonlijke God'. See also De Dijn, 'Gods attribuut Denken en Gods oneindig intellekt bij Spinoza'.

⁹⁸ Hubbeling, *Spinoza*, 70.

⁹⁹ Burms and De Dijn, *De rationaliteit en haar grenzen*; De Dijn, *Hoe overleven we de vrijheid?* and *Kan kennis troosten?*.

¹⁰⁰ Burms and De Dijn, *De rationaliteit en haar grenzen*, 40–41.

This is corroborated by De Dijn's treatment of the relativism associated with Wittgenstein's distinction between different, incomparable forms of life, which he addressed after a brief treatment of Spinoza's 'third kind of knowledge', the knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*.¹⁰¹ It is typical of De Dijn's existential approach that he should take a bypath in his analysis of laughter, and of smiling in particular. Smiling, De Dijn argued, is characterised by the paradox of distance and interest.¹⁰² The self-knowledge developed by the Spinozist sage of his own emotions displays a similarly paradoxical structure, De Dijn observed. Spinoza's confidence in rationality as guiding principle cannot be assumed to bring lasting happiness. The future remains uncertain and the sage's trust in reason cannot be supported by reason itself: leading a 'rational' life, therefore, should be regarded as the result not so much of any theory as of a definite attitude of trust in the salutary effects of reason.¹⁰³ Again, this hardly looks like a 'Spinozist' stance, but in a series of papers on Spinoza De Dijn wrote prior to *Kan kennis troosten?* he had already started questioning the interpretation according to which Spinoza was the author of an exclusively intellectualist theory of salvation, arguing that his radical critique of anthropocentrism forestalls any qualification of Spinoza as an 'optimistic rationalist'. The *E*, De Dijn concluded, was not written by a naive Stoic. Spinoza's confidence in the power of reason over the passions was not at all unlimited. He was not an egocentric cynic either, and he constantly affirmed that knowledge and especially knowledge of God should not be sought because of anything beyond knowledge itself. It should not be cherished on account of the effects it produces: knowledge, Spinoza keeps telling us, is its own reward.

De Dijn's more recent writings on Spinoza's views on the salutary effects of 'intuitive knowledge' are characterised by two paradoxes, which are both highlighted in *Kan kennis troosten?* First, there is the recognition that 'decentration', that is the removal of man from the centre of the universe actually enables him to experience his connection to the universe. Second, De Dijn attempts to interpret the universe as alien and 'connected' at the same time, as both the completely 'Other' as well as the source of our own existence:

¹⁰¹ De Dijn, *Kan kennis troosten?*, 80–86.

¹⁰² See also De Dijn, 'Spinoza: rationalist en mysticus?'

¹⁰³ Cf. De Dijn, *Hoe overleven we de vrijheid?*, 105–125.

The paradox of decentration and acceptance concerning the self is matched in Spinoza by the paradox of God-Nature as absolutely Other and yet Source of ourselves. Spinoza's God-Nature is not the cosy Whole in which we can feel at home (and which modern man would foolishly betray and spoil). Nature does not care about man, God is not a father, but not a Mother either. At each moment Nature can be cruel and bring terrible disaster (that's why men have to stick together, and to use all their cleverness and power). Nature has no peculiar aims, neither to bring about mankind, nor especially to destroy it (even though it will, at some point, be destroyed). And yet, this very urge in us to live and to prosper, as human beings, is an expression of this formidable life-force itself: we are made of no other clay. The truth about us is that we are the not-wanted who cannot but want to be wanted.¹⁰⁴

According to *Kan kennis troosten?* Spinoza is one of the philosophers 'with whom' De Dijn set out to think.¹⁰⁵ In view of the use made of *E IV* and *V*, Spinoza obviously remained a crucial source to De Dijn, just as Wittgenstein did. Conversely, it seems equally clear that the increasingly *moral* orientation of De Dijn's thought considerably affected his interpretation of Spinoza. During the 1970s he was generally considered an admirer and an exponent of Martial Gueroult's structuralistic reading of the *E*. His own (unpublished) dissertation was written in a similar vein. In more recent publications, however, he has turned into a sharp critic of the lack of interest Gueroult displayed in the *moral* dimension of the *E*.¹⁰⁶

During the 1980s, next to Huib Hubbeling and Herman de Dijn, a third Dutch-speaking philosopher specialising in Spinoza started drawing attention. While Hubbeling and De Dijn displayed an obvious willingness to be inspired by his work, Wim Klever of the Erasmus University Rotterdam was prepared to go much further. Since the early 1980s, Klever, a former Hegelian, has published almost exclusively on Spinoza, who to his mind is first and foremost the author of a *true* philosophy. In his *Voorbeschikking* (Predestination), for example, of 1989, we are told first that Spinoza was a determinist, second, that he expounded a 'Stoic physicalism', which, third, is a 'perfect expression of the scientific philosophy of predestination',¹⁰⁷ which according to Klever is the only *true* philosophy:

¹⁰⁴ De Dijn, 'Knowledge, Anthropocentrism and Salvation', 258–259. Cf. De Dijn, 'The Compatibility of Determinism and Moral Attitudes' and 'Wisdom and Theoretical Knowledge in Spinoza'.

¹⁰⁵ De Dijn, *Kan kennis troosten?*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ De Dijn, *De epistemologie van Spinoza*. Compare, for instance De Dijn's 'Metaphysics as Ethics' with his 'God, substantie, attribuut, modus'.

¹⁰⁷ Klever, *Voorbeschikking*, 112–113.

All the thinking power in us induces us irrevocably to the acceptance of pre-destination, of the necessary determination of each thing by the complete, previous and simultaneous collection of things.¹⁰⁸

Klever purported to provide a strictly scientific interpretation of Spinozism, diametrically opposed to De Dijn's moral reading of the *E*. Klever's Spinoza was first of all a *scientist*. A natural scientist, to be more precise, and no moral philosopher, let alone a metaphysician, for in Klever's perspective Nature is all there is, so there is no object of research beyond or besides Nature, and in the figure of Spinoza philosophy reached a unique climax. With Spinoza, or so Klever appeared to feel, philosophy necessarily came to an end. In fact, it would seem that according to Klever philosophers interested in truth are best advised to study Spinoza:¹⁰⁹

Spinoza confronts us with the only philosophy that is in accordance with science, or to put it differently: with the philosophy which inevitably results from the science of man and nature. In sum, this philosophy leaves no room for philosophical speculations that are not supported by science or do not agree with its findings. Hence, Spinoza is the philosopher who being a scientist has denied the right of existence of any philosophy not in accordance with science. He has effectively demonstrated how a scientist can be a sage (...) Therefore Spinoza is the quintessential anti-philosopher in the cultural history of the modern, Western world. As a consequence, his followers are not to be looked for among philosophers. We can only find these followers elsewhere, in the growing army of scientific researchers who, without ever mentioning Spinoza, because they regard this as self-evident, all share the assumption that everything which occurs in nature is the necessary product of nature as a whole.¹¹⁰

Klever's treatment of Spinoza's texts also differs dramatically from De Dijn's, for whereas De Dijn regards Spinoza as one of the philosophers 'with whom' he proceeds to formulate his own thought, Klever views Spinoza as the author of a perfect oeuvre in which Truth itself is articulated. So it came as no surprise that by far his most voluminous work on Spinoza consisted of a paraphrasing commentary on the *E*, curiously entitled *Ethicom*. The *E*, according to Klever, is 'a sacred text', 'containing

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 114. Cf. his '*Moles in Motu*'.

¹⁰⁹ A telling example of Klever's conviction that Spinoza is always right and that his views have remained as topical and as applicable as they were some three hundred years ago is to be found in his *Zuivere economische wetenschap*, 139–140, where the *TP* is presented as an authoritative source supporting Klever's suggestion to spread arms among the male population between 20 and 60 years old. Cf. Klever, 'Krijgsmacht en defensie in Spinoza's politieke theorie'.

¹¹⁰ Klever, *Voorbeschikking*, 96.

inexhaustible wisdom regarding human behaviour'.¹¹¹ On the one hand Klever has emphasised how 'abnormal'¹¹² Spinoza's 'philosophy' is, but on the other he has also argued in favour of the close affinity between Spinoza's determinism and its Greek ancestry. He has also tried to show the impact Spinoza had both on British empiricism and on the French Enlightenment.¹¹³ This diversity of historical associations confirms Klever's a-historical, essentially *time-less* aspirations. In *Mannen rond Spinoza* (Men around Spinoza) of 1997, he collected several of his historical papers, but he was the first to admit that this kind of research should be perceived as nothing but a 'byway', as an attempt, that is, to seduce 'potential pupils' to 'humbly' study Spinoza's own work.¹¹⁴

Fittingly, Hubbeling once referred to Klever's 'conversion' to Spinozism.¹¹⁵ In the late 1970s Klever still felt Spinoza's axiomatic way of reasoning had been superseded by Hegelian dialectics.¹¹⁶ But many of his later insights appear to be present already in his *Dialectisch denken* (Dialectical Thinking) of 1981, and it would seem that in particular his reading of Gaston Bachelard played a major part in his embrace of Spinozism.¹¹⁷ The main development in Klever's 'philosophy' has been one of increasing radicalism and growing frustration over the errors of his colleagues. In *Voorbeschikking* he still expressed his desire that this book would be recognised by other 'Spinoza-scholars' as an authentically Spinozist text.¹¹⁸ Klever's *Een nieuwe Spinoza* (A New Spinoza) of 1995, however, was based on the conviction that his colleagues had utterly failed to grasp the essence of Spinozism.¹¹⁹ 'For the time being', Klever was musing by now, 'master-classes seem to offer the only solution' in creating any understanding of Spinoza's views, but sadly, he concluded, 'the time is not yet ready'.¹²⁰ Inevitably he became involved in countless controversies both in scholarly

¹¹¹ Klever, *Ethicom*, 5.

¹¹² Klever, *Spinoza. Verhandeling over de verbetering van het verstand*, 13. Cf. 45–47, and, for instance, *Voorbeschikking*, 7: 'This philosophy is an aberration'.

¹¹³ Cf. for example Klever, 'Slocke, alias locke in Spinozistic Profile'.

¹¹⁴ Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza*, 10.

¹¹⁵ Hubbeling, 'De studie van het spinozisme in Nederland', 11–12.

¹¹⁶ Klever, 'Dialectiek contra axiomatiek' and 'Ervaring en rede'.

¹¹⁷ Klever, *Dialectisch denken*, esp. 59–95; 'De epistemologie van Gaston Bachelard; Wiskunde en dialectiek'; 'De wiskundige rede'. See also Gil, 'Le "vrai" spinoziste de Brunschwig à Bachelard'.

¹¹⁸ Klever, *Voorbeschikking*, 10.

¹¹⁹ Klever, *Een nieuwe Spinoza*, 7.

¹²⁰ Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza*, 10.

journals and in the Dutch media.¹²¹ At least, the ambiguities typical of Hubbeling's and De Dijn's approach to Spinoza, that is their shared attitude of both 'distance' and 'interest', is absent from Klever's 'Spinozism'.

Not that Hubbeling and De Dijn occasionally did not also strike a more personal note. While not cultivating scholarly aloofness, their own engagement was decidedly more circumspect. Hubbeling provided an insight into his own feelings when writing about the Calvinist theologian Gunning, mentioned above, a theologian he characterised as a man 'who had always admired the unity of life and philosophy we find in Spinoza'.¹²² This comes close to a self-portrait, and Hubbeling, Klever and De Dijn had more in common than meets the eye. The three of them all found their entrance into Spinozism by studying its theory of knowledge.¹²³ They also shared a fascination for Wittgenstein, and they were all equally *severe* in their concern for *God, Man and His Well-Being*. Hubbeling enjoyed nothing so much as dissecting the logical intricacies of the various ways of demonstrating the existence of God; De Dijn was not afraid to tackle the meaning of life and the necessity 'to live in truth'; and Klever did not shy away from addressing 'the logic of the universe'.¹²⁴ Clearly, none of them were impressed by post-modern irony concerning the pretensions of philosophy, and this may well have ensured them a large audience of non-academic readers, with a predominantly existentialist interest in philosophy. Finally, they were, of course, *contemporaries*. Hubbeling was born in 1925, De Dijn in 1945, and Klever in 1930: each in his own way witnessed what was arguably the most important cultural development taking place in the Netherlands and Flanders during the 1960s and 1970s in particular: the rapid and startling secularisation process.

The rise of the 'scholarly' Dutch Spinozism that Ferdinand Sassen detected in the early 1970s was not merely inspired by academic concerns.

¹²¹ Following the publication of an essay in *NRC-Handelsblad* of 24 December 1983, a debate started in this newspaper on Klever's account of Antonio Negri's reliance on Spinoza. A few years later, Klever again hit the news with his discovery of Franciscus van den Enden as 'proto-Spinoza' (*NRC*, 8 May 1990) as well as with his claim to have found, in the library of Leiden University, an unknown manuscript of Spinoza's. With the latter story, he made it to the eight o'clock news on Dutch television (3 October 1995). Again, a furious polemic ensued. See, for example, Mertens, 'Franciscus van den Enden' and Steenbakkers, 'Spinozistische begoochelingen.'

¹²² Hubbeling, *Spinoza*, 36. Cf. Gunning, *Spinoza en de idee der persoonlijkheid* and Betz, *Spinoza en de vrijheid*.

¹²³ See for instance their respective contributions to *Studia Spinoziana* 2 (1986), *Spinoza's Epistemology*.

¹²⁴ De Dijn, *Kan kennis troosten?*, 9 and 35 ff.; Klever, 'De logica van het universum'.

The existential motive evident in its three main proponents was even stronger in such post-war authors as Leopold Flam (1912–1995), Theun de Vries (1907–2005) and Anton Constandse (1899–1985), who were mainly known for their political activism. Their interest in Spinozism was largely inspired by its emancipatory potential. In a sense they continued the ‘propagandist’ tradition first established by Van Vloten, heralding Spinoza as the spokesman of a fully-grown humanity (*‘de blijde boedschapper der mondige mensheid’*).¹²⁵ The Belgian philosopher Leopold Flam, a Jewish Marxist, was of the opinion that ‘a so-called objective or scientific’ history of philosophy was simply inconceivable:¹²⁶ ‘we have to take a stance’, for no genuine philosophy can afford not to be existential. History only acquires meaning, Flam felt, the moment it is addressed by philosophers, and every philosopher aims to establish a meaningful existence.¹²⁷ In 1969 Flam painted a grim picture of his own, personal experience:

Raised in a milieu which was alien in every respect to the society surrounding it and which was of such a spiritual depravity, to a young man the problem of having any spiritual life became a matter of life and death, and to a boy aged fifteen the history of philosophy acquired great importance. The philosophers we met were called Plato and Spinoza, and afterwards Hegel and Marx, and after that Schopenhauer, and a little later Nietzsche. Plato was present through *Socrates’ Apology* (“the philosophical life”) and the turn toward the light (in *The Republic* and the *Phaedrus*). Spinoza’s rationalism meant the clarity of human relations, the possibility of approaching others independently of the passions, the freedom from hate, de freedom also from poverty, the *Amor Dei intellectualis*. We lived in surroundings in which superstition ruled as a kind of modern magic. Therefore, the acceptance of a severe rationalism to us meant being liberated from a depressing atmosphere. We left the basements in which we lived and moved towards the open skies. To the poor and frightened adolescent, Spinoza was like the breaking of a new day, but this implied an act of revolt against our surroundings, although we did not realise this at the time. Almost simultaneously we discovered Marx as the theoretician of the revolt.¹²⁸

‘Flam,’ as Louis Paul Boon once put it, ‘that is smoke, fire, sparks, subterranean rumbling, eternal unrest.’¹²⁹ In Flam’s experience, Spinoza represented intellectual independence, and this existential approach dated

¹²⁵ Thissen, ‘Een wijsgerige beweging in Nederland’ and ‘Images of Light and Shadow’.

¹²⁶ Flam, *Wording en ontbinding van de filosofie*, 154.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 155–156. Cf. Flam, ‘Spinoza en het nihilisme’.

¹²⁹ Strauven, ‘Leopold Flam’.

from an early age. As early as 1962, well before the revival of Dutch Spinozism, he had dubbed Spinoza the icon of ‘free thought’:

Free thought and philosophy are one and the same, and to put an end to philosophy by refusing her is identical to appealing to theology. This insight is part of Spinoza’s glory.¹³⁰

Flam’s Spinoza was heir to Bruno and Pomponazzi, and the patriarch of the *philosophes*, Lessing, Goethe, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Stirner, Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche. Only in Spinoza, Flam felt, philosophy becomes ‘genuine religiosity’.¹³¹ Young Flemish freethinkers such as Étienne Vermeersch, of Ghent, would be increasingly inspired by the natural sciences, but Vermeersch too would turn out to hold a deep-felt sympathy for Spinoza.¹³²

In Brussels, at the Free University and more in particular at its Center for the Study of the Enlightenment, Leopold Flam had every opportunity to situate Spinoza in the heart of the history of freethinking: as director of the Center he stimulated important research, for instance into Adriaan Koerbagh.¹³³ He was also responsible for a theme issue of the *Tijdschrift voor de studie van de Verlichting* on Spinoza’s political philosophy. A remarkable contribution to this issue was made by the well known Dutch marxist and novelist Theun de Vries (1907–2005).¹³⁴ De Vries rejected Flam’s picture of Spinoza as an *esprit fort*, for in Spinoza, De Vries observed, we look in vain for the libertine ‘connection between unbelief, witty intellectualism, high office and unbridled lust’.¹³⁵ Spinoza, De Vries continued, was too *Dutch* to be an *esprit fort*. In his eyes, Spinoza lived ‘between the classes’, and developed his philosophy ‘at the crossroads’ of Dutch late humanism and Descartes’ mechanisation of the world picture, such as it took shape in the writings of De Witt, Hudde and Huygens.¹³⁶ It was at these crossroads that Spinoza discovered his essentially emancipatory ‘art of life’, which testified, if anything, to an unshakeable belief in the power of man to liberate himself.¹³⁷ This could also have been written by

¹³⁰ Flam, *Verleden en toekomst van de filosofie*, 9.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 134. Cf. Flam, ‘De Toland à D’Holbach’.

¹³² In the Belgian daily *De Standaard* of 27 August 2005, for instance, Vermeersch called Spinoza ‘the first truly enlightened human being’.

¹³³ See, for instance, Vandebossche, ‘Adriaan Koerbagh en Spinoza’.

¹³⁴ De Vries, ‘Het Nederlands kenmerk van Spinoza’s staatkundig denken’. See also his *Spinoza* and *De Gezagende*.

¹³⁵ De Vries, *Spinoza*, 54.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 172. Cf. Verbij, ‘De spinozisten’, 24, quoting De Vries: ‘Crucial to me is Spinoza’s demand that man should emancipate himself into a rational being, who has discarded

Flam, or, for that matter, by the journalist and essayist Anton Constandse (1899–1985), arguably the best known twentieth-century Dutch anarchist and the author of very popular history of humanism in which Spinoza figures prominently.¹³⁸

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, after the Second World War both Dutch and Flemish philosophers initially largely ignored Spinoza. The growing interest in his thought after the 1960s was almost entirely due to Huib Huijbeling and Herman de Dijn. During the 1970s, together they completely dominated Dutch-language Spinoza research. Most of all, they succeeded in finding a connection to the foreign, that is, French revival of Spinoza research.¹³⁹ In the following decade academic interest in Spinozism grew considerably: Spinoza's Latin, but also his relationship to the Dutch Republic and the early reception of his work became the object of important research. In addition, Wim Klever turned into a controversial author whose identification with Spinozism grew almost complete. Finally, Leo Flam testified to his intellectual indebtedness to Spinoza and Étienne Vermeersch also turned out to be inspired by the Dutch philosopher.

Sassen's observation, made in 1971, that a 'scholarly' Dutch Spinozism was on the rise, was right on the spot, although its academic shape could not hide from view its existential inspiration. In view of the increasing professionalism of late twentieth-century philosophy both in Flanders and the Netherlands, it could come as no surprise that this new Dutch Spinozism looked as 'scholarly' as it did. This hardly interfered with the interest in Spinoza among the wider audience, which seems all the more remarkable in view of the limited impact Spinoza had among professional Dutch

superstition and who displays a clear and tolerant view of society. At the time, this was beautifully utopian. Spinoza believed it to be possible to reach some sort of perfection. This would only take patience. But I don't believe this. I don't believe this perfect human being will ever come.'

¹³⁸ Constandse, *Geschiedenis van het humanisme in Nederland*, 62–79. See also his *Bevrijding door verachting*, 30–50; 'Multatuli en Spinoza'; *Het soevereine ik*, 64–73. Partly inspired by the French, structuralist commentaries appearing in France during the late 1960s and early 1970s, several Dutch authors have tackled the issue of whether Spinoza can be called a 'humanist' at all: Zweerman, 'Spinoza en de hedendaagse kritiek op het humanisme'; Spigt, 'Bampaal-mijlpaal'; Klever, 'Humanistisch anti-humanisme'.

¹³⁹ See, for example, Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*.

philosophers outside the charmed circle of specialists. The Vereniging Het Spinozahuis, which in the first place brings together 'laymen', remained active even when the 'professionals' completely ignored Spinoza. Sassen also made the suggestion that, perhaps, now that scholars had taken the lead, the many disputes characteristic of earlier phases of Dutch Spinozism could be avoided, but as it turned out scholars were just as willing and able to differ sharply amongst themselves. All major philosophers, of course, have been interpreted very differently and the history of Spinozism is no exception. From the seventeenth century onward a wide variety of 'Spinozisms' has flourished.¹⁴⁰ Both Pieter Balling and Adriaan Koerbagh were labelled 'Spinozists', just as van Vloten and Bierens de Haan were. There is hardly any subject in Spinoza which has not given rise to conflicting views and interpretations. Seen in the light of the wider history of attempts to appropriate Spinoza's thought, it would seem that this is not just another example of sectarian squabbling.

Spinoza has found such an astounding diversity of modern-day representatives that it becomes virtually impossible to explain his 'presence' in any single way. Flam, Hubbeling, De Dijn and Klever did not belong to any particular 'school', and they did not even share the principles of any common programme. Their fascination with Wittgenstein, which many modern Spinozists share, and their special interest in Spinoza's theory of knowledge is not very helpful either. Neither is their obviously felt affinity with Spinoza's personality. Even their seriousness does not single them out. Perhaps we should arrive at the conclusion that it is precisely the absence of any 'orthodoxy' in Spinozism which is truly revelatory. Perhaps it belongs to the essence of Dutch Spinozism to lack any stable identity. Pierre Macherey once observed that Spinoza's philosophy appears to be able to reinvent itself all the time:

c'est cette dynamique historique qu'elle porte avec elle, sa puissance apparemment inépuisable de renouvellement, qui lui permet, au-delà des bornes d'un savoir théorique prétendument achevé, dont le contenu serait définitivement inscrit dans la forme de son discours, se produire, ou de se reproduire, non comme une seule philosophie, mais comme plusieurs, et peut-être comme une infinité de philosophies.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 5.

¹⁴¹ Macherey, 'Spinoza au présent', 7–8.

In the Low Countries Spinozism has proven itself to be an ‘open’ philosophy. This is not to say that each and every interpretation put forward was justified, nor does this presage Spinozism’s future disappearance, if only for a while. Shortly after World War Two Spinozism *was* ignored. But its openness does seem to suggest that in a sense Spinoza was, indeed, the author of a *philosophia perennis*.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT: A DUTCH PERSPECTIVE¹

1. *The Dutch Enlightenment Debate: Fortuyn, Van Gogh, and Hirsi Ali*

In many Western countries the Enlightenment has again become the subject of heated debate. Unfortunately, in the Netherlands the political rediscovery of the Enlightenment has remained largely restricted to right-wing liberals critical of Islam. Although there can be little doubt that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have accelerated the worldwide dispute regarding Western attitudes toward religiously inspired activism, the anxieties caused by the immigration of several million Muslims into Britain, France, Germany, the Low Countries and Scandinavia had restored the Enlightenment to a prominent position in European public debate well before 2001. During the 1990s the broad consensus on the inevitability and desirability of a multi-cultural society had already come under attack in the Netherlands from the right as well as from some left-wing opinion makers, particularly after the sociologist and one-time Marxist Pim Fortuyn started claiming that politicians had completely ignored the cultural, that is, religious background of Muslim immigrants as a possible obstacle to their full integration.² His main objection to Islam was perfectly straightforward in that Fortuyn insisted it had never gone through an 'Enlightenment' such as 'ours'.

¹ See also my *De Nederlandse Republiek*.

² Pim Fortuyn wrote a large number of books. The first in which he criticized Islam, in 1997, was entitled *Tegen de Islamisering van onze cultuur*, essentially a collection of columns. The most serious attempt so far to assess his legacy: Pels, *De geest van Pim*. Probably owing to the dark memory of the Second World War and the fate of the Dutch Jewish community of some 110,000 people, which was largely destroyed, until the 1990s it had been a taboo to discuss the position of the immigrant work force and its cultural background. The growing realization that the stories told of the heroism displayed by the Dutch resistance were indeed more often than not just stories only added to the unwillingness to even discuss the rapidly growing presence of the Muslim minority in Dutch society. Just prior to Fortuyn only two public intellectuals had put the issue of multiculturalism on the agenda: the right-wing politician and future European commissioner Frits Bolkestein, and the left-wing publicist Paul Scheffer. For some of the backgrounds, see Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam*.

Amidst alarming reports of a series of anti-semitic incidents and gay-bashing, both involving young Moroccans, Fortuyn's star began to rise, though the large majority of Dutch intellectuals were hardly impressed by his populist Muslim-bashing or his complaints against what he liked to call the 'left-wing Church' with its reputation for political correctness. Shortly after gaining a resounding victory in the Rotterdam municipal elections on 6 May 2002, several days before the general election, Fortuyn was killed by one Volkert van der Graaf, no Muslim at all but an activist from the environmentalist movement. Even Fortuyn's most ardent critics were left in shock and his assassination made headline news across the world as did the gruesome murder, on 2 November 2004, of Theo van Gogh by Mohammed Bouyeri, an Amsterdam Muslim whose parents were, indeed, from Morocco.

Fortuyn and Van Gogh could hardly have been more different personalities. Fortuyn, a former associate professor of sociology at the University of Groningen and extraordinary professor at the Erasmus University, was an overtly gay dandy who flaunted his wardrobe, butler, Italian 'palazzo' and his young Moroccan lovers. To his own amazement he suddenly found himself heading a populist, right-wing movement that soon after his death, however, collapsed disgracefully. Theo van Gogh, on the other hand, great-grandson to Vincent's brother, a gifted film director, seemed to relish posing as a fat and sweaty chain-smoking drunk. The many quarrels he was involved in forced him to finance his movies with private means, which in turn necessitated him to embark on a profitable but undistinguished career as a television presenter and newspaper columnist.³ Over the years, his columns grew increasingly critical of Islam, turning him into one of the most reviled public personalities in the eyes of the large Muslim community of the Netherlands.

From the early 2000s, however, the Dutch personality most hated by the Muslim community has been Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali refugee with an MA in political science who became a Liberal member of the Dutch parliament, and who has made it her mission to fight what according to her amounts to a systematic and worldwide suppression of women by

³ His first movie, entitled *Luger* (1981), with which he graduated from Art School, already caused a minor row on account of its 'a-moral' and 'decadent' obsession with violence. He seems to have modeled his public persona largely on the late German film director Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Remarkably, soon after Van Gogh started writing columns, he was accused for many years both by the novelist Leon de Winter and by his fellow columnist Hugo Brandt Corstius of anti-semitism.

Islam. One of her books, entitled *The Caged Virgin*, was translated into English in the summer of 2006 shortly after she left parliament and joined the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, a conservative think tank in Washington.⁴ Her departure from Dutch politics was extremely tumultuous, following an announcement made only weeks before she left for the States by the minister for immigration affairs—a member of the same political party as Hirsi Ali's, it should be added—that owing to her lying about the reasons for her flight from Africa, Hirsi Ali's passport had to be declared invalid. Hirsi Ali immediately gave up her seat in parliament, the Dutch coalition government fell, and again, the Netherlands made headline news. What made her departure for the US singularly embarrassing for the political establishment and a cause for public outrage, was the fact that due to her campaign Hirsi Ali had received a series of apparently very serious death threats from Muslim extremists, forcing her to be accompanied constantly by security officers. Even her staunchest critics had to admire her personal courage. Mohammed Bouyeri, Theo van Gogh's murderer, had knifed a long letter into Van Gogh's body, addressed to Hirsi Ali, packed with presages concerning her impending 'punishment' and 'downfall'. The alliance between Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali had been struck when they jointly made a short film on Muslim suppression of women, entitled *Submission*.

Both Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali joined Pim Fortuyn in his assessment of the lack of an Islamic Enlightenment, and Hirsi Ali has announced repeatedly to be working on a book, tentatively entitled *A Short-Cut to Enlightenment*. On 3 April 2005, The New York Times Magazine published a major article on her under the title 'Daughter of the Enlightenment'. What is more, her former lover, the Utrecht professor of philosophy Herman Philipse, revealed that on a visit to the States in 2004 Hirsi Ali studied the full text of Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* with a fervour he found endearing.⁵ Philipse did so in a pamphlet on 'Enlightenment Fundamentalism', published in 2005, in which he chastised the Dutch minister of justice, a Christian-democrat who in a much-quoted newspaper interview had argued that adherents of the Enlightenment were just as 'fundamentalist' as believers in any religious truth, since they were unable to question the foundations of their 'belief'. Apparently,

⁴ Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*. The Dutch original, *De zoontjesfabriek*, was published in 2002.

⁵ Philipse, *Verlichtingsfundamentalisme?*, 9–10.

Philipse felt urged to intervene also since Hirsi Ali had repeatedly let it be known that she herself owed much to another pamphlet published by Philipse in 1995, in which he had argued for the intellectual superiority of atheism.⁶ At the time, this booklet had caused some discussion among Dutch intellectuals, but it was mainly perceived as a clever tease.⁷ By the early 2000s it clearly had acquired a completely new, political urgency.

From a scholarly perspective, the most striking aspect of this sudden political resurgence of interest in the Enlightenment is of course the complete lack of ambition to examine the nature of the Enlightenment as such. Perhaps we should not be surprised by this, but the fact that across the globe countless professional scholars have made it their business to address the question what this phenomenon actually amounted to, to the extent that the question as to the very *existence* of any such thing as *the* Enlightenment keeps the experts divided to this day, does not seem to enter the discussion of politicians, columnists and activists at all. Perhaps the experts have done too little to let their findings be known outside their own professional arena.⁸ Yet this ignorance is harmless in comparison to the equally self-assured refusal *to study* the Enlightenment that characterizes most of the Enlightenment ‘critiques’ put forward by philosophers from Adorno and Foucault to John Gray—a tradition that has found its Dutch spokesman in Andreas Kinneging, a founding member of the conservative Edmund Burke foundation.⁹

Thus, in the Netherlands, the public debate on the Enlightenment has turned into a polemic between right-wing liberals who simply regard every religion as inferior to Enlightenment and conservatives who reject the Enlightenment altogether, while the left has little more to offer than to comment that every attempt to try and ‘integrate’ foreign immigrants into the ‘civilized’ West is proof of antiquated nationalism. According to Peter van der Veer, for instance, a prominent sociologist of religion, all we are witnessing today is the natural result of centuries of exploitation of the South by the North and any attempt by rich northerners to discipline poor southerners into adhering to the principles of Enlightenment will inevitably fail, for ‘ever since the Enlightenment it has become impossible

⁶ The second edition has now been enlarged and a preface by Hirsi Ali added: Philipse, *Atheïstisch manifest*.

⁷ Professionally, Philipse is mainly known for his papers in epistemology and his extremely critical monograph on Heidegger: *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*.

⁸ This point has been made for the US by Hollinger, ‘The Enlightenment and the Genealogy of Cultural Conflict’.

⁹ Kinneging, *Geografie van goed en kwaad*.

to find a foundation for moral judgments'. According to Van der Veer, in the post-Enlightenment world, 'relativism is a given'.¹⁰ The argument that criticism of the Enlightenment has traditionally nourished the political right plays no role in the Dutch debate.¹¹

The recent scholarly rediscovery of the Enlightenment, meanwhile, has not at all been inspired by an overwhelmingly right-wing agenda. This is not to say that this latest development is unrelated to broader intellectual concerns. On the contrary, growing uneasiness among the experts about the often all too shabby way in which postmodern critics have crucified 'the Enlightenment project' no doubt played a major role in the emergence of a new self-confidence among eighteenth-century-specialists, who amongst each other knew only too well that for instance Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, first published in 1947 in Amsterdam, as Roy Porter drily put it, 'is historical baloney'.¹² Robert Darnton, as early as 1997, had taken up the gauntlet in a much-quoted essay on the gratuity of postmodernists who seemed to believe that the mere mention of Nietzsche, Adorno or Foucault sufficed to debunk the Enlightenment both as a historical reality and as a philosophically viable perspective.¹³ The demise of postmodernism has no doubt encouraged historians to try and recapture what the Enlightenment was all about.¹⁴

2. Radical Enlightenment

Among the books that have recently put *the Enlightenment* back on the historians' agenda, Jonathan Israel's was no doubt the most provocative, for his *Radical Enlightenment* takes to task a long and powerful tradition of scholarship by questioning some of its most fundamental presuppositions.¹⁵ An important precursor to Israel's attack on the dominant perception of the Enlightenment was Margaret Jacob's *The Radical Enlightenment*,

¹⁰ Van der Veer, *Islam en het 'beschaafde' Westen*, 28: 'vanaf de Verlichting is een fundering van morele oordelen niet meer mogelijk en is relativisme een gegeven.' The accompanying footnote just mentions Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor.

¹¹ Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason*.

¹² Porter, *Enlightenment*, 486.

¹³ Darnton, 'George Washington's False Teeth'. See, however, Popkin, 'Robert Darnton's Alternative (to the) Enlightenment'.

¹⁴ See for instance, Im Hof, *The Enlightenment*; Outram, *The Enlightenment*; Porter, *The Enlightenment*; Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*. See also Hunt and Jacob, 'Enlightenment Studies' and Gordon, 'On the Supposed Obsolescence of the French Enlightenment'.

¹⁵ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

published in 1981.¹⁶ Whereas Jacob concentrated on political radicalism in the early eighteenth century among disaffected Huguenots residing in London and in the province of Holland, which led her to the *suspicion* that, somehow, 'Spinozism' had survived the death of its author in 1677, Jonathan Israel was able to show the *reality* of Spinozism during the final decades of the seventeenth century, in particular, of course, in the Dutch Republic. Serious research into the early dissemination of Spinoza's philosophy only got under way during the early 1980s.¹⁷ As the author of *The Dutch Republic*, generally considered to be the best general history of the Republic now available, he was in an excellent position to bring together (and add considerably to) our present knowledge of the uproar caused by the publication of Spinoza's *TTP* and *OP*, containing the *E*.¹⁸ In view of the attention *The Dutch Republic* had already paid to Spinoza, Balthasar Bekker and Frederik van Leenhof, *Radical Enlightenment* came well prepared.

Jonathan Israel is deeply dissatisfied with most of what has been written over the last few decades on the nature and the history of the Enlightenment in Europe. Growing uneasiness among students of the eighteenth century with the attempts by historians of ideas such as most notably Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay, to somehow identify the 'essence' of Enlightenment *thought*, inspired cultural and social historians to capture first and foremost the *practice* of Enlightenment. What is more, an increasing awareness of the sharp differences between the several *national* if not local varieties of Enlightenment culture throughout Europe prevented the experts from attempting to reduce the Enlightenment to a single programme, let alone a single slogan, such as, most famously, Kant's 'sapere aude'. Inspired by the brilliant examples of the work of Franco Venturi and John Pocock in particular, they preferred to show a diversity of Enlightenments, which in many cases prompted a bewildering conceptual charity, allowing for all

¹⁶ Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment*. See also her 'Radicalism in the Dutch Enlightenment'.

¹⁷ Until quite recently, the reception of Spinozism had only been dealt with seriously by Thijssen-Schout, *Nederlands cartesianisme* and Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*. From the early 1980s onwards, a series of relevant publications saw the light of day, including Cramer, Jacobs, and Schmidt-Biggemann (eds.), *Spinozas Ethik und ihre frühe Wirkung*; Gründer and Schmidt-Biggemann (eds.), *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*; Schröder, *Spinoza in der deutschen Frühaufklärung*; Bloch (ed.), *Spinoza au XVIII^e siècle*; Cristofolini (ed.), *L'Hérésie spinoziste*; Van Bunge and Klever (eds.), *Disguised and Overt Spinozism*; Berti, Charles, Daubert, and Popkin (eds.), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free-Thought*; Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza*.

¹⁸ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*.

sorts of 'Enlightenments' that turned out much easier to distinguish than to identify as the expression of any common enterprise. In the Dutch case, it has become customary to discuss, for instance, the so-called 'reformato-rische Verlichting' (reformatory Enlightenment), spearheaded by some of the most orthodox Dutch Protestants of the time.¹⁹

In Jonathan Israel's view, both the emphasis on eighteenth-century practice and the dominant trend to concentrate on local varieties of enlightened culture, including all its widely divergent expressions, have obscured the fact that the Enlightenment was primarily a philosophical phenomenon and that there *was* a common agenda. Unless we are prepared to consider both Israel's claims as serious comments on late-twentieth-century Enlightenment studies, *Radical Enlightenment* will fail to convince, for the obvious reason that this book does not merely attempt to identify the *core* of the *real* Enlightenment, but in addition is singularly ambitious in its identification of the Enlightenment's author, and hence of its actual birthplace. According to Israel it is clear 'that Spinoza and Spinozism were in fact the intellectual backbone of the European Radical Enlightenment everywhere, not only in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, and Scandinavia, but also Britain and Ireland.' Since this Radical Enlightenment contained the essence of what subsequent Enlightenment thinkers held to be true, and since it marked 'the most dramatic step forward toward secularization in Europe's history',²⁰ it was far more important than either the Renaissance or the Reformation—important, that is, in 'the Making of Modernity'.

3. *Spinoza's 'Circle'*

In a sense, Jonathan Israel's dissatisfaction with the recent massive shift of attention to 'practice' and to local variety in eighteenth-century culture seems perfectly justified. Difficult as it may be, it seems high time to integrate the history of philosophy into the wider cultural history of Europe. The lack of interest among *dix-huitièmistes* in the fate of Spinozism during the early Enlightenment has now been shown to be deeply flawed, and the way in which prominent cultural historians dealing with the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic also managed to ignore Spinoza has become just

¹⁹ Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, Chapter 1. See also the Introduction to Van Bunge (ed.), *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic*.

²⁰ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, vi.

as embarrassing.²¹ But the picture painted in *Radical Enlightenment* of the ‘Spinozists’ assessment of religion and the nature of the ‘secularizing’ impact of their efforts is a highly particular one. In Israel’s rendering, the Spinozan Enlightenment is very much a secularizing, that is anti-religious phenomenon, for in his analysis of Spinoza’s views the emphasis is on the denial of miracles, and more in general on his ‘prime contribution to the evolution of early modern Naturalism, fatalism, and irreligion’.²² By doing so, Israel faithfully follows the contemporary *perception* of Spinozism, but the obvious question raised by this approach is whether it results in an accurate picture of the nature of the Radical Enlightenment, and more in particular of its initial stages, that is of its first flowering in the Dutch Republic.

Indeed, this approach entails a definite tension in the portrayal of the Radical Enlightenment’s principal protagonists from the start, for in Israel’s view the first signs of the coming of this revolutionary wave about to sweep the wider European Republic of Letters, and even significant parts of the reading public at large, are to be found in the activities of the Zeeland Collegiant Plockhoy, whose Protestant fervour is obvious.²³ Significantly, Plockhoy, who appears to have been a major source of inspiration to Spinoza’s teacher Franciscus van den Enden, based his egalitarianism on a strictly biblical basis, which turned him into a close ally of the Puritan cause. As far as Franciscus van den Enden’s stance vis-à-vis religion is concerned, Frank Mertens’ recent research clearly confirms the religious background of his revolutionary views on human equality, political democracy and the abolition of slavery.²⁴

Another key figure in the early proliferation of Dutch radicalism is the Amsterdam playwright, lexicographer, and physician Lodewijk Meyer, the author of the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* (1666). Meyer’s anti-theological stance, which closely resembles Van den Enden’s, is indeed beyond dispute, although this does not necessarily imply an anti-religious position.²⁵ Then there are the obvious figures of Pieter Balling and Jarich Jelles, two close personal friends of Spinoza, key figures in the Amsterdam

²¹ See, for instance, Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, and for the historiography of the Radical Enlightenment: Mijnhardt, ‘The Construction of Silence’.

²² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 230.

²³ *Ibid.*, 177–180.

²⁴ Mertens, *Franciscus van den Enden’s Brief Account*. See for all the Dutch authors mentioned below also Van Bunge et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*.

²⁵ See on Meyer most recently: Bordoli, *Ragione e Scritura and Etica, arte, scienza*.

'circle', frequent correspondents and crucial members of the group responsible for the publication and translation of Spinoza's works. Both were also extremely critical of Reformed theology as they knew it, but remained fervent Mennonites: in 1662 Balling wrote a short spiritualistic essay on 'the inner light' of reason, in which Scripture hardly plays any role. Jelles composed the preface to the *Opera posthuma*, aiming to demonstrate that the philosophy of Spinoza was perfectly compatible with Scripture.²⁶ Jelles also wrote a personal confession, first published in 1684, of which only a single copy appears to have survived, in which he further develops his notion of a strictly rational, Unitarian Christianity that no longer rests on any supernatural revelation.²⁷

The case of the Koerbagh brothers presents another excellent illustration of the religious impetus behind even the most daring radicals active in Amsterdam during the first stadholderless period. According to Israel, Koerbagh's *Een Ligt* came down to a wholesale 'rejection of Christianity'.²⁸ Quite apart from such obvious facts as that Johannes Koerbagh, who was partly responsible for Adriaan's writings, was a Reformed theologian, *Een Ligt* in my view is no attack on religion as such. On the contrary, in the *Bloemhof* Koerbagh had already claimed that it was his purpose to *reform* the Reformed creed, since it did not live up to its name.²⁹ In *Een Ligt* the study of Nature is called 'true theology', since God is Nature;³⁰ indeed, 'true theology', Koerbagh claimed, is part of 'worldly wisdom' (waereldse wijsheyd).³¹ Accordingly, true religion is presented as the product of reason.³²

Koerbagh's main aim was to purify religion as he knew it, and especially the way in which he tried to construct a biblical basis for his findings, quoting hundreds of scriptural texts in support of his views, and more importantly perhaps the way in which he dealt with the figure of Christ, seem to reveal his religious bent of mind. He made much of the fact that

²⁶ On Balling's and Jelles' personal views, see Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église*, 206–225; Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, Chapter 8. On their work as Spinoza's editors: Akkerman, *Studies in the Posthumous Works of Spinoza*; Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica*. Balling's role in the Amsterdam 'circle' may have been smaller than was suspected, now that Lambour has found out that he died as early as December 1664: 'De Amsterdamse collegiant Jacob Jansen Voogd', footnote 16.

²⁷ Jelles, *Professione della fede universale e cristiana*.

²⁸ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 194.

²⁹ Koerbagh, *Een Bloemhof*, 327–328.

³⁰ Koerbagh, *Een Ligt*, 698.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³² *Ibid.*, 236.

Christ was called our ‘Saviour’, since He told the Truth, and by doing so ‘saved’ us from ignorance, and instilled ‘knowledge, wisdom and reason’ (*kennisse, wijsheid en verstand*).³³ Finally, Koerbagh’s plea in favour of religious toleration points to a similar conclusion, since in Koerbagh’s view it is simply *not Christian* to be intolerant: ‘Jesus teaches us’, Koerbagh wrote, ‘to be gentle and humble’ (*sagtmoedig en nederig van herten*).³⁴

In two splendid essays on Koerbagh, Michiel Wielema has emphasized that although Koerbagh’s assessment of revealed religion is at least as radical as Spinoza’s, this cannot hide the fact that according to *Een Ligt*, ‘Reason is the True Word of God’. According to Wielema, Koerbagh’s scathing critique of Christian dogmatics should not hide from view the constructive aspect of his work: ‘there is an unmistakable *religious* dimension to his own work’.³⁵ According to Israel, however, it would be a mistake to regard Koerbagh as an ally of the Socinians, whom Koerbagh criticizes as well, and what is more, the philosophical significance of Socinianism should not be overestimated.³⁶ Indeed, in the Dutch Republic the spread of Socinianism seems to have been limited in comparison to Britain and Germany.³⁷ However, Cis van Heertum has recently unearthed the library catalog of the Koerbagh brothers, and as it turns out, it contains a truly massive amount of Socinian literature.³⁸ Indeed, there seems to be every reason to consider the Dutch Radical Enlightenment as intimately related to the Radical Reformation—as is suggested, for instance, by Koerbagh’s insistence to *continue* the Reformation, and to complete more in particular the rational Reformation instigated by the ‘Socinians’

4. *Spinoza on Religion*

A full discussion of Spinoza’s assessment of Christianity does not seem appropriate here, but a few comments on Israel’s analysis may be in order. Israel’s emphasis on the theological uproar provoked by Spinozism could

³³ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

³⁵ Wielema, ‘The Two Faces of Adriaan Koerbagh’ and ‘Adriaan Koerbagh: Biblical Criticism and Enlightenment’. Wielema has recently completed a full translation of *Een Ligt*.

³⁶ Israel, ‘Meyer, Koerbagh’.

³⁷ For two recent assessments, see Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* I, Chapters 1 and 2, and Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund*, Chapters 2 and 3. See also Mulsow and Rohls (eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism*.

³⁸ Van Heertum, ‘Reading the Career of Johannes Koerbagh’.

easily disguise both the deeply religious inspiration of many of his Dutch admirers as well as Spinoza's positive assessment of religion as such. As far as Spinoza's own evaluation of religion is concerned, it should first be established that from the outset he seems to have been concerned first and foremost with the question of how to obtain *salvation*. Most scholars agree that the *TIE* is the earliest text we now have of Spinoza, and this lends a particular poignancy to its famous opening lines, the more so since it conveys a very rare glimpse into his personal life:

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which could be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity.³⁹

Of course, it is true that in the *E* the fulfillment of this quest yields a secular solution, for it turns out to be a very particular kind of *knowledge* concerning Nature and man's position in Nature that contains the highest good. Yet there can be little doubt that Spinoza was ultimately concerned with the state of man's 'soul'. What is more, the final propositions of the *E* invoke a conceptual vocabulary which has a decidedly religious connotation: it turns out that 'the mind' is best advised 'to love God' (*E*, V, 16), since 'Knowledge of God is the mind's greatest good; its virtue is to know God' (*E*, IV, 28). Indeed, the highest form of knowledge, necessarily producing 'intellectual love of God', is 'eternal' (*E*, V, 33) and this love 'is the very love of God by which God loves himself' (*E*, V, 36).

Some commentators have shown their lack of appreciation for this part of the *E*, one of them bluntly commenting that it is 'rubbish which causes others to write rubbish',⁴⁰ but once we compare these propositions with what Spinoza writes in the *TTP* about religion as a *second* road to salvation, this attitude seems no longer warranted. In the *TTP* Spinoza repeats the claim 'that our supreme good and perfection depends solely on the

³⁹ De Dijn, *Spinoza*, 19. This book contains the translation of the *TIE* made by Edwin Curley for his edition of *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. These opening lines have been studied extensively: Zweerman, *L'Introduction à la philosophie selon Spinoza*.

⁴⁰ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 374. On the next and final page of his book Bennett concludes: 'Those of us who love and admire Spinoza's philosophical work should in sad silence avert their eyes from the second half of Part 5.'

knowledge of God' and concludes accordingly: 'This, then, is the sum of our supreme good and blessedness, to wit, the knowledge and love of God.'⁴¹ Although Spinoza explicitly affirms 'that the intellectual love of God which contemplates his nature as it really is in itself (...) has no bearing on the practice of a true way of life, on faith and on religion',⁴² he continues to enumerate 'the dogmas of universal faith, the basic teachings which Scripture as a whole intends to justify'.⁴³ There is no point in hiding from view the major interpretative problems these dogmas present us with. In particular the seventh dogma, according to which 'God forgives repentant sinners',⁴⁴ has always worried commentators, especially since many of them have tried to understand them as constituting a *minimal creed*—a core *truth*, that is, contained in Scripture, which is otherwise not concerned with truth, but only with obedience and piety.⁴⁵

Regardless of whether we accept the ultimate conclusion of Spinoza's separation of philosophy from theology, namely that theology is ultimately impossible since it is unable to produce truth, this leaves intact what the *TTP* has to say on faith, namely that to the extent that it leads to obedience to God, it *saves*:

faith must be defined as the holding of certain beliefs about God such that, without these beliefs, there cannot be obedience to God, and if this obedience is posited, these beliefs are necessarily posited. (...) I shall now briefly show what consequences it [the definition of faith, WvB] entails. First, faith does not bring salvation through itself, but only by reason of obedience (...) Secondly, it follows that he who is truly obedient necessarily possesses a true and saving faith.⁴⁶

What according to the *TTP* this 'obedience to God' amounts to is clear, for the beliefs necessary for obedience are defined as 'those that strengthen the will to love one's neighbour',⁴⁷ and Scripture itself 'tells us quite clearly over and over again what every man should do in order to serve God, declaring that the entire Law consists in this alone, to love one's neighbour'.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 103.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁵ See, most recently, Verbeek, *Spinoza's Tractatus Theological-Political Treatise*, Chapter 1.

⁴⁶ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 222.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

Again, this is not the place to address the issue of the coherence of Spinoza's writings in detail, but then again the problem facing us is not so much what from a philosophical perspective might yield the most convincing reading of Spinoza, but rather how Spinoza's Protestant friends and admirers may have come under the spell of his philosophy, which, of course, by the majority of his contemporaries was considered dangerous if not evil. For the curious fact about Dutch Spinozism was that it brought together such *franc-tireurs* as Lodewijk Meyer and Johannes Duijkerius and Mennonites and Calvinists such as Pieter Balling and Frederik van Leenhof. Most attempts to come to terms with the real difference in outlook to be found in the *E* on the one hand and the *TTP* on the other concentrate on the epistemological and metaphysical complications resulting from a comparison between these two books.⁴⁹ However, once we have identified Spinoza's main aim as moral and essentially concerned with the question of how to obtain 'salvation', it might not be such a bad idea to take our point of departure from the ethical outlook presented in these two texts. If we do so, it would seem that no major divergence emerges. The core of the moral philosophy developed in the *E* shows at least a remarkable similarity to the morality Spinoza claims to discover in Scripture, for in the *E* the *commandment* to love one's neighbour returns as a matter-of-fact *description* of human nature.⁵⁰

In direct opposition to Hobbes, Spinoza in the *E* presents the fact that men as a rule prefer to live together as the expression of their *natural sociability*. Being asked how he felt about Hobbes, Spinoza in a letter to Jelles replied that 'the difference between Hobbes and myself' consisted 'in this, that I always preserve the natural right in its entirety'.⁵¹ The existence of societies does not require any artificial decision on the part of its subjects, for instance, to draw up a contract. Societies are the direct result of human nature, or so Spinoza holds. Recognizing in your fellow-man the similarities to your own condition as a human being is both natural and rational. It is natural since it is natural to recognize that what happens to other human beings affects us differently from what happens to clouds or bricks, and it is reasonable, precisely since the recognition of what human beings have in common hinges on the development of *notiones communes*, concepts expressing what human beings have in common.

⁴⁹ See also Cook, 'Did Spinoza Lie to His Landlady?'.

⁵⁰ Chapter 7.

⁵¹ Spinoza, *Letters*, 258 (Letter 50).

Rationality, according to Spinoza, is not the product of any specific faculty called ‘reason’, reason being the succession of adequate ideas, based on notions of what things have in common (*E*, II, 40 schol. 2). Spinoza not only insists that there are such notions—since all bodies agree in certain things—but also that they can only be conceived adequately (*E*, II, 38) and that whatever ideas follow from such adequate ideas will have to be adequate as well (*E*, II, 40).⁵² Since human beings will inevitably recognize their similarity to other human beings, they cannot fail to be affected by what affects other people, as Spinoza demonstrates in III, 27: ‘If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect’. In the accompanying scholium Spinoza refers to this mechanism as ‘this imitation of affects’, which when related to sadness ‘is called pity’, but when related to desire ‘is called emulation’.⁵³ This line of reasoning is further developed in the fourth part of the *E*, and is brought to a conclusion in proposition 37: ‘The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men, and this desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater’—essentially based on proposition 35: ‘Only insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, must they always agree in nature’, its first corollary: ‘1. There is no singular thing in nature which is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason’, and its famous scholium: ‘man is a God to man’. This is repeated in the appendix to the fourth part: ‘IX. Nothing can agree more with the nature of any thing than another individual of the same species’, which leads again to the conclusion, that ‘nothing is more useful to man in preserving his being and enjoying a rational life than a man who is guided by reason.’ As far as I can see, this moral philosophy, based on the notion of a natural sociability of man, ultimately derived from man’s striving for self-preservation, is in basic agreement with the biblical commandment to love one’s neighbour. As a matter of fact, in the first scholium to *E*, IV, 37, Spinoza quite suddenly introduces his notion of ‘*religio*’, as if to remind us of the *TPP*:

whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, or insofar as we know God, I relate to religion. The desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason, I call morality.⁵⁴

⁵² Gueroult, *Spinoza. II*, Chapter 11, esp. 340–341.

⁵³ Matheron, *Individu et communauté*, 154 ff.

⁵⁴ See a recent Dutch (Nijmegen) dissertation: Juffermans, *Drie perspectieven op religie*, Chapter 6.

It is this similarity in moral outlook between Spinoza's own philosophy and the prescriptions of what in his view represented true faith which seems to account for the anger Spinoza expressed when one of his correspondents, after having read the *TPP*, accused him of atheism. (It also seems appropriate that Spinoza in his indignant reply referred first to the way he *lived*).⁵⁵ And it may well have been the convergence between his naturalistic moral philosophy and the message delivered by Christ, which spurred him to treat Christ as a *philosopher*, who 'communed with God mind to mind'.⁵⁶ As a consequence, God did not have to accommodate Himself to Christ, in the way that He did when communicating with the prophets, since Christ 'perceived things truly and adequately'.⁵⁷ According to Israel, Spinoza's emphasis on the special significance of Christ was basically a ploy, and should be seen as 'springing from a deeply felt need to form a tactical alliance, as a helpful device for promoting the kind of campaign he believed could potentially reform society and politics, and institute the true *libertas philosophandi*'.⁵⁸ But even if this were true, and I don't think it is, it would not at all exclude the possibility of a genuine kinship between Spinoza and some of his Protestant friends.

5. *The Spread of a Movement*

After Spinoza's death, the first public debate on the issue of whether a Christian could be a Spinozist flared up in Rotterdam, for a local Collegiant by the name of Johannes Bredenburg, after having issued an interesting refutation of the *TPP*, no longer felt able to withstand the lure of Spinozism.⁵⁹ Once Bredenburg's change of mind became public—an opponent from the Rotterdam 'college' had copied a manuscript circulating among Bredenburg's friends and published it, together with a demonstration that its author could no longer pose as a Christian—several dozens of pamphlets were published, and the large majority of Bredenburg's fellow Collegiants seem to have been shocked by their friend's views. What is more, Bredenburg himself insisted that he desperately wanted to remain

⁵⁵ Spinoza, *Letters*, 237 (Letter 43).

⁵⁶ Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 107. See Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, Chapter 9.

⁵⁸ Israel, 'Meyer, Koerbagh', 199.

⁵⁹ On Bredenburg, see Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église*, 250–292; Van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691)*; Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, Chapter 9; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 19.

loyal to his former belief, for instance, in the freedom of the will, but that ‘reason’ prevented him from doing so. He even went so far as to publish a series of poems reflecting his personal, religious crisis due to his inability to find any faults in Spinoza’s philosophy, after which he ended up as something of a fideist. Not surprisingly, Pierre Bayle was fascinated by the whole affair, and he added a long footnote on Bredenburg to his well-known article on Spinoza in the *Dictionnaire*.

Two other important examples of Dutch radicalism highlighted in *Radical Enlightenment* belong just as much to the *religious* history of the Dutch Republic, for whereas Anthonie van Dale, the author of *De Oraculis* (1683), was a sincere Mennonite, his friend Balthasar Bekker, who in 1691–93 published *De betoverde Weereld*, was a well-respected Calvinist minister.⁶⁰ Their critical analyses of the historical reliability of accounts involving the supernatural no doubt contributed to a growing scepticism regarding both divine and diabolical intervention in the natural course of events, but there can be little doubt that both of them conceived of their efforts as aiming at a *purification* of the Reformed tradition. Neither of them were freethinkers, let alone Spinozists. They just felt that it was high time to get rid of a number of ‘superstitions’ unfortunately left in place by the Reformation.

It is true that some Dutch Spinozists, such as most notably Johannes Duijkerius, the author of the infamous *Philopater*-novels (1691–97), and possibly also Abraham Cuffeler, the author of a Spinozist logic entitled *Specimen artis ratiocinandi* (1684), seem to have been prepared to cut all ties with the Reformed creed.⁶¹ Yet many radicals active during the early Dutch Enlightenment, including Balthasar Bekker, appear to have been inspired by what Margaret Jacob once called a shared ‘fierce monotheism’,⁶² coupled with a general faith in reason as the instrument best suited to cleanse Christianity from some of the stains accumulated over the centuries by—essentially ‘Popish’—superstition. In particular early Dutch Spinozists such as Meyer and Koerbagh seem to have shared a deep-felt revulsion over the way in which theological disputes had been spilling over into the political domain, and had more often than not resulted into

⁶⁰ On Van Dale, see Evers, ‘Die “Orakel” von Anthonie van Dale (1638–1708)’; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 20. On Bekker, see the Introduction to Bekker, *Die bezauerte Welt; Fix, Fallen Angels*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 21.

⁶¹ On Duijkerius, see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 17. On Cuffeler, see Klever, *Mannen rond Spinoza*, Chapter 8; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 311–314.

⁶² Jacob, ‘The Crisis of the European Mind: Hazard Revisited’.

violence. In the Dutch Republic, Spinoza's philosophy appears to have been perceived by some contemporaries as a way out of the perpetual theological conflicts wrecking the state. Its promise to deliver a philosophical vocabulary capable of answering the Ultimate Questions, which was just as certain and indubitable as Euclidean geometry, must have held a huge appeal for some. Here at last, or so Spinoza's friends seem to have thought, was a view of the world, of God, man and his well-being which excluded the interpretative uncertainties Scripture continued to yield. Here at last was a philosophy which could put an end to the sectarianism that was widely considered a continuing threat to the stability of the republic.⁶³

Let's not forget that the entire history of this young Dutch Republic, which lacked any strong central authority and which never had a State Church either, had been marred by *discordia*: from the Synod of Dordt in 1619 to William II's attack on Amsterdam in 1650 to the chaos resulting from the French invasion of 1672 and the assassination of Johan and Cornelis de Witt, the fear of civil discord never withered. The disastrous consequences of civil war had been spelt out convincingly by Justus Lipsius as early as the 1580s: the loose, federal character of the United Provinces hardly guaranteed political stability, and in a very real sense, the entire history of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic was a quest for *concordia*, for as the motto of the States General had it—and has it to this day: '*Concordia res parvae crescunt*'. In Dutch: '*Eendracht maakt macht*'.

Even the constant appeal to Nature popular among Dutch radicals did not necessarily signify a decrease in religious fervour, since seventeenth-century scholars and scientists continued to regard their fascination with the details of nature as resulting from the perception that 'the Book of Nature' had been authored by God. Spinoza actually claimed that 'the more we understand singular things, the more we understand God' (*E*, V, 24).⁶⁴ Of course, the efforts of Koerbagh and Spinoza, Bredenburg and Bekker, could be read as examples of at least some kind of secularization, in the sense that they introduced new standards for assessing the authority of Scripture and that several of them questioned the professional authority of theologians. I therefore agree with Israel's assessment of the Radical Enlightenment as a secularizing phenomenon, but the remarkable fact is that this process was embedded in an essentially religious vocabulary,

⁶³ Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 5.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Jorink, "Outside God there is Nothing" and *Het Boeck der Natuere*.

revealing, or so it would seem, predominantly eschatological and reformatory concerns. Accordingly, my doubts concerning *Radical Enlightenment* relate to the continuity of Spinozism as a historical phenomenon. There just seem to be fundamental differences in outlook between the radical Dutch Protestants, whose deeply religious fervour is beyond doubt, and especially the subsequent French 'spinozistes', who were also heir to the essentially sceptical tradition of the *libertinage érudit*.

The lack of a Dutch reception of the *libertinage* represents a major difference between French and Dutch Spinozism, which seems to evaporate, by the way, after the upheavals concerning Frederik van Leenhof in the early eighteenth century.⁶⁵ In particular a comparison between the derogatory treatment of Christ and Moses in some of the clandestine manuscripts circulating around 1700 and Spinoza's own, highly positive comments on Christ and Moses reveals the major differences between Dutch and French radicalism during the early Enlightenment.⁶⁶ In stark contrast to most notably the *Traité des trois imposteurs*, in the *TTP* Christ is hailed as a unique philosopher, while Moses is praised as a brilliant statesman.

Although Dutch publishing houses served French sceptics well, Pyrrhonism only became a matter of concern to Dutch authors after the introduction of Cartesianism. In Spinoza's view, the Pyrrhonist challenge did not present a genuine problem, and his Dutch admirers do not seem to have been particularly concerned about scepticism as a philosophical issue. As I have noticed before, the only Dutch Spinozist I know who quoted Spinoza and Vanini was Adriaan Beverland—in my view a perfectly eccentric pornographer, who can hardly be regarded as representing major intellectual and cultural developments.⁶⁷ Even in the company of other Dutch pornographers, including 'John Shit' (Jan Stront), he cuts an odd figure, if only on account of his awesome erudition.⁶⁸ The last major Spinozist active in the Dutch Republic seems to have been the Zwolle minister Frederik van Leenhof.⁶⁹ Again, Van Leenhof's *Den hemel op aarden* (1703) is largely devoted to the question of how to obtain salvation. Although this Calvinist *dominee* was particularly concerned with the

⁶⁵ Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 5.

⁶⁶ Chapter 5.

⁶⁷ De Smet, *Hadrianus Beverlandus*. See, however, also Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 87–88.

⁶⁸ Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*, 250 ff.

⁶⁹ On Van Leenhof, see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 22 and Wielema, *The March of the Libertines*, Chapter 4.

meaning of salvation in this life, he did not deny the reality of an afterlife, and as Michiel Wielema has pointed out, despite Van Leenhof's attention to the moral psychology leading to human happiness (*blydschap*), his world-view is perfectly 'theocentric'.

This is not to say that all Dutch Spinozists were essentially *Chrétiens sans Église*. 'Spinozists' such as Meyer, Beverland, Cuffeler, and Duijkerius do not strike me as particularly devout. It would also seem that Spinoza's circle of friends from The Hague was significantly less concerned with the further purification of the Reformed tradition than his Amsterdam friends were. But this seems to imply that even the coherence of Dutch 'Spinozism' as a *single* philosophical project, at the heart of the Enlightenment, becomes questionable. Perhaps we are best advised to regard 'Spinozism' as a common denominator of several historical 'projects', and it is this variety which might actually help us to come to terms with the remarkable fact that it contributed both to the materialism emerging during the French High Enlightenment (and in the Netherlands during the second half of the nineteenth century),⁷⁰ and to Lessing's quest for a new, 'reasonable' religion and the *Pantheismusstreit*.⁷¹

Modern commentators have largely tended to favour the first tradition. But while we should indeed take seriously the contemporary reaction to Spinoza as an atheist, a materialist and a fatalist—since they convey a historical reality, namely the way in which Spinozism was perceived by the large majority of its first commentators—we should also be able to account for the equally real facts that Spinoza strongly objected to the accusation of atheism, that his first Dutch followers were predominantly devout Protestants, and that he became a major source of inspiration to a succession of German thinkers who were disgusted with French materialism. Indeed, much could be said, and recently has been said, about the claim that eighteenth-century French materialism was essentially Spinozist in nature: Ann Thomson has emphasized the medical background of early eighteenth-century materialism, and Yves Citton has stressed the 'imaginary' nature of French Enlightenment Spinozism.⁷²

⁷⁰ Thissen, *De spinozisten*.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Pätzold, *Spinoza, Aufklärung, Idealismus* and Krop, 'A Dutch *Spinozismusstreit*'.

⁷² See Thomson, *Bodies of Thought*; Citton, *L'Envers de la liberté*.

6. Conclusion

Jonathan Israel's insistence on the need to bring Philosophy back to Enlightenment scholarship, as well as his attempt to define a coherent intellectual programme underlying the European Enlightenment, were long overdue. But the way in which he portrays the Spinozan Radical Enlightenment as a single, continuous movement also raises doubts. And although in many respects it may look very modern to us today precisely on account of its secular character, in particular the insistence on the 'secularizing' nature of the Radical Enlightenment should perhaps be reconsidered—not least since the recognition of the essentially religious background to the original Radical Enlightenment offers a possibility of rediscovering a common ground on which, during the second half of the seventeenth century, radical Protestants joined forces with libertine philosophers. In recent scholarship the contribution of religion to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment has been emphasized repeatedly, also by John Robertson, who agrees with Israel on the need to distinguish a coherent Enlightenment 'programme', but hastens to add 'that the intellectual coherence of the Enlightenment was not predicated upon a complete denial of the possibility of revealed religion'.⁷³

The recognition that, according to Spinoza, religion is not something that should be abolished, does not at all presuppose a reading of Spinoza aimed at de-naturalizing his metaphysics. Clearly, the supernatural is no significant category in Spinoza's thought, and previous attempts to turn Spinoza into some kind of Idealist are deeply flawed as well. One of the great achievements, however, of modern Spinoza scholarship was the rediscovery of Spinoza's recognition of imagination as a formative and often positive aspect of man's cognitive make-up.⁷⁴ Moses imagined God to be Israel's Ruler—much as this may have been a philosophical 'error', it also provided the fleeing Israelites with a moral code that proved to be very beneficial. At a time in which the assessment of the Enlightenment has become fraught with political connotations, as it has today, we are perhaps best advised to concentrate on what secular and indeed atheist intellectuals have in common with those who regard religion as a genuine

⁷³ Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, 31. To name just the most obvious examples: Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion* and Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution*. See on the major role of religion in late eighteenth-century Dutch radicalism Rosendaal, *Bataven!*

⁷⁴ See, for instance, Vinciguerra, *Spinoza et le signe*.

source of inspiration. For not only does the radical Enlightenment that Hirsi Ali admires run the risk of being simplified and reduced to the negative conclusion that God does not exist, the political situation of an increasingly secular society such as the Netherlands, which is suddenly confronted with a large and deeply religious minority finding it difficult to find a place of their own, does not so much call for polemics as for prudence.

Today's religious radicals are semi-illiterate, as could be gauged from the letter Mohammed Bouyeri stuck into Theo van Gogh's chest. For those of us who feel that freedom, equality and emancipation are non-negotiable and to be pursued for their universal significance, the first concern should be to isolate these radicals. To achieve this it does not seem helpful to 'demonstrate' that the God they pray to does not really exist, nor to question the accuracy of what they regard as having been revealed. Instead, it may well turn out to be far more productive to point out that a Spinozist Enlightenment may still matter today not only for its uncompromising, indeed radical commitment to rationality and its departure from the Cartesian *Cogito*, which saves it from the *Sackgasse* of Idealism, but also for its imaginative assessment of religion as such. As a consequence, those of us who are not content with merely *describing* the reality of mass immigration, nor even those of us who agree with Philipse's contention that no appeal to supernatural sources of truth should be allowed in any meaningful debate, should let themselves be seduced into targeting Muslims as the latest obstacle toward Enlightenment.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Philipse, *Atheïstisch manifest*, 135 argues that Protestant theologians seem prepared to admit that the 'stories' they find inspiring do not refer to an extra-mental *reality*. Catholics and Muslims, Philipse continues, are not so prepared, hence a genuine dialogue with Catholics and Muslims is impossible.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SPINOZA PAST AND PRESENT

Over the last three and a half centuries few philosophers' reputations have enjoyed reversals of fortune as dramatic as Spinoza's. Today there are Spinoza societies in the United States, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Israel, and the Netherlands. The *Vereniging Het Spinozahuis*, the Society that owns the house Spinoza lived in at Rijnsburg, has well over a thousand members, making it the largest philosophical society in the Netherlands. It holds lectures twice a year, inviting many of the leading scholars around the world. On an annual basis it organises summer schools on all aspects of Spinoza's legacy, attracting scores of visitors. In 1997, in celebration of the centenary of *Het Spinozahuis*, a major exhibition of paintings, sculptures and installations inspired by Spinoza's life and work was staged in Amsterdam.¹ Before the introduction of the euro, the Dutch thousand guilders banknote bore the portrait of Spinoza, and no major city in the Netherlands is without its *Spinozalaan*, -straat or -weg. Just as Rotterdam has a *Gymnasium Erasmianum* and an *Erasmus Universiteit*, Amsterdam is proud of its *Spinoza Lyceum*. The visiting chair in philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, held among others by Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, and Judith Butler, is named the *Spinoza Chair*, and the most prestigious prize awarded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) is known as the *Spinoza Premie*.

To a seventeenth-century observer these public tokens of appreciation if not veneration must have seemed very odd. From the early 1660s, before Spinoza had published a single word, until the end of the eighteenth century, there appears to have been general agreement about the subversive nature of his philosophy. Both Spinoza's *TTP* (1670) and the *OP* (1677), including most famously the *E*, were banned even in the Dutch Republic. Spinoza's views were widely held to be those of an atheist, materialist and fatalist. Indeed, his views were deemed a serious threat to the very basis of decent society. Although during the early Enlightenment Spinoza continued to inspire dozens of radical thinkers, particularly on the European

¹ The catalogue, issued by the Society *Arti et Amicitiae*, is entitled *De steen vliegt/A Stone in Flight*.

continent, he only attained his nearly canonical status as one of the three main continental ‘rationalists’ thanks to the highly specific view of the history of philosophy that was developed in German Idealism. Following the sketch drawn in the final chapter of Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781/89), entitled ‘Zur Geschichte der reinen Vernunft’, and in particular after Hegel’s *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (1837), Spinoza was put on a par with Descartes and Leibniz as one of the historical ‘opponents’ of British empiricism, represented of course by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.² The famous *Pantheismusstreit* that broke out in 1785 over Lessing’s confession to Jacobi, that he had secretly been a ‘Spinozist’, ensured that around 1800 the assessment of Spinoza’s thought was high on the philosophical agenda.³

It has become a cliché to warn against the historical pitfalls of this essentially Kantian picture of early Enlightenment thought, which clearly served highly specific philosophical objectives and more in particular Kant’s personal ambition to present his own ‘critical’ philosophy as the solution to the mid-eighteenth-century stalemate between empiricist ‘scepticism’ and rationalist ‘dogmatism’. Much of what has recently been written on early modern philosophy aims to come to an alternative understanding of the history of philosophy from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.⁴ Spinoza’s ‘rationalism’, for instance, does not so much reflect his views on the source as on the *scope* of our knowledge. And although his epistemology differed significantly from Bacon’s or Locke’s, it makes little sense to regard Spinoza as an anti-empiricist.⁵ But so far,

² Apart from such isolated studies as those of Altkirch, *Maledictus und Benedictus* and Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, serious research into the reception of Spinoza’s philosophy only took off during the 1980s. By far the most comprehensive syntheses available are Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* and *Enlightenment Contested*. It should be added that during the eighteenth century there seems to have been far more German interest in Spinoza prior to the rise of Idealism than has been acknowledged so far. See besides Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* and *Enlightenment Contested*: Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption*, Part 1; Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund*; Zammito, “The Most Hidden Conditions of Men of the First Rank”; Krop, ‘A Dutch *Spinozismusstreit*’.

³ The literature is of course predominantly German. See, most notably: Walther (ed.), *Spinoza und der deutsche Idealismus*; Grün, *Das Erwachen der Materie*; Delf, Schoeps, and Walther (eds.), *Spinoza in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte*; Otto, *Studien*, Part 2; Pätzold, *Spinoza—Aufklärung—Idealismus*; Czelinski, Kieser, Schnepf, Senn, and Stenzel (eds.), *Transformation der Metaphysik in die Moderne*.

⁴ For an impressive attempt to construct an alternative interpretation of German eighteenth-century thought, in which Spinozism plays no significant part, see Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments*.

⁵ Moreau, *Spinoza. L’Expérience et l’éternité*.

no convincing alternative interpretation of eighteenth-century thought has been put forward, and the now dominant tendency to situate Enlightenment culture in a *national* context is a further obstacle to developing such an alternative.⁶

Despite Kant's own reticence about Spinoza, and although Fichte based his *Wissenschaftslehre* on the notion that a truly critical philosophy would first and foremost have to oppose dogmatism (i.e. Spinozism), both Schelling and Hegel regarded Spinoza as one of their main sources of inspiration. Shortly after Hegel's death, Heinrich Heine went so far as to claim that, in fact, Spinoza's 'pantheism' had been Germany's 'secret religion'.⁷ Over the next two centuries Spinoza's philosophical reputation would continue to be closely linked especially to Hegel's: during the second half of the nineteenth century, when interest in Spinoza in some countries such as the Netherlands grew spectacularly, Spinozism was conceived of as the most reliable antidote to Idealism. Freethinkers like Johannes van Vloten, who incidentally published the first edition of the *KV*, clashed repeatedly with academic philosophers defending Kantian, 'critical' epistemologies.⁸ In Britain, where until the late nineteenth century interest in Spinoza had remained largely sporadic, the rise of Hegelianism first provoked substantial debate about the Dutch philosopher.⁹ During the first half of the twentieth century, however, until the 1960s, interest in Spinoza waned again. As long as neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, existentialism, and logical positivism and their various offshoots set the agenda both in Europe and the United States, Spinozism remained at best a source of historical inquiry. But all this changed dramatically in the 1960s, and again, this resurgence of interest was closely linked to the fate of Hegelianism. Pierre Macherey, today one of the most influential interpreters of Spinoza and the author of a five-volume commentary on the *E*, in 1979 explicitly put the question in the title of one of his books: *Hegel ou Spinoza*.¹⁰

⁶ See the Introduction to Van Bunge (ed.), *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic*.

⁷ Heine, *Werke* VIII–I, 62. See Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*.

⁸ Thissen, *De spinozisten*.

⁹ See Boucher (ed.), *Spinoza in English* and the six volumes, edited by Boucher, entitled *Spinoza. Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Discussions*. For an interesting discussion of nineteenth-century interest in Spinoza, see Moreau, 'Spinoza's Reception and Influence'.

¹⁰ Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza*. See also his *Avec Spinoza* and *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza*, 5 vols. The first volume to appear in this running commentary concerned *E V*, the last one *E I*.

1. *The Works*

Macherey is part of a much larger intellectual phenomenon in France (that is, Paris) that first emerged in the late 1960s. During the second half of this fateful decade Spinoza was suddenly rediscovered by an entire generation of left-wing philosophers, who all in one way or another followed Louis Althusser's advice to study the *E* in order to re-inform Marxism. This movement was bolstered by two brilliant commentaries on the *E* written by Martial Gueroult and Alexandre Matheron.¹¹ In 1968 Gueroult published his massive book on *E I*, to be followed in 1974 by the posthumous publication of his study of *E II*. Gueroult had already become a major authority on Descartes, Malebranche, and Fichte after introducing a new method of studying philosophical texts. For what seem to have been primarily aesthetic reasons, he consciously ignored the wider context in which these texts served a variety of purposes. He was exclusively interested in the internal logic of philosophical 'systems', and the *E*, in all its 'geometric' rigour, turned out to be an ideal 'object' for this internal reading. Thus, Gueroult inspired several generations of French scholars who studied the texts of Spinoza in this way. The work currently being done by Étienne Balibar, Pierre-François Moreau, Chantal Jaquet, Laurent Bove, Charles Ramond, Lorenzo Vinciguerra, Yves Citton and many others would have been unthinkable had it not been for Gueroult, who may not have been inspired by any personal philosophical ambitions, but whose 'post-structuralist' analyses also inspired contemporaries such as Michel Foucault.¹²

Today, several of Gueroult's insights are being discussed anew, but the heart of his interpretation of the *E* still seems to stand, for in particular his attack on any attempt to interpret Spinoza's philosophy along idealist lines was indeed lethal. This attack informs his entire commentary, and is made explicit in a long appendix directed against Harry Wolfson's *Spinoza* (1934).¹³ It concerns Spinoza's ambiguous definition of God's 'attributes'. As will be only too familiar, Spinoza conceives of the whole of reality as a substance consisting of infinite attributes that are defined as 'what the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence' (*E*, I, def.4).

¹¹ Gueroult, *Spinoza I* and *Spinoza II*; Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*.

¹² Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, Introduction. For a collection of essays, translated into English, by Althusser, Deleuze, Matheron, Macherey, Moreau and others in English, see Montag and Stolze (eds.), *The New Spinoza*.

¹³ Gueroult, *Spinoza I*, appendix 3; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*.

From the seventeenth century onward this definition has left readers of the *E* wondering whether attributes should be interpreted in an idealist fashion or realistically. Do they merely reflect our subjective perception of reality or do they express the very essence of substance itself? Gueroult was the first commentator to demonstrate clearly that in Spinoza's view substance is nothing but the totality of its attributes, each of which produces an infinite number of modes, including individual minds produced by the attribute of Thought. (One of the curious aspects of Spinoza's theory is, of course, his view that the mind is an idea, a product of the attribute of Thought.) As a consequence, Gueroult argued, turning attributes into the subjective result of man's perception of substance subverts the logical order of Spinoza's metaphysics, according to which attributes produce modes instead of the other way around. Thus Gueroult closed the door to all possible Platonist readings of the *E*. Although Spinoza's earliest work, including the *KV* (c. 1660), does reveal traces of neo-Platonism, the mature philosopher can in no way be associated with the view that the (modal) world *emanates* from a single principle, i.e. Substance.

Gueroult dealt a final blow to idealist readings of the *E* in his second commentary, on Spinoza's epistemology. It is true that Spinoza's theory of knowledge is formulated in a Cartesian vocabulary, as a result of which knowledge becomes something to be analysed in terms of *ideas* the mind has of objects, but Gueroult's analysis of what Spinoza calls *adequate* ideas only goes to confirm the latter's 'realism': because our adequate ideas are identical to the ideas God has in his infinite intellect (i.e. all ideas, of which our mind, which is also an idea, is a part), we are able to understand the world in a truly *objective* manner, God or his attributes being the real cause of both objects *and* ideas, which express the same *ordo et connectio* (*E*, II, 7). The fact that there are adequate ideas, that real knowledge is possible, does not hinge on our ability to form ideas that can be identified as objective owing to their specific characteristics, such as their clarity and distinctness. Instead, Spinoza justifies the adequacy of clear and distinct ideas by outlining a metaphysics that demonstrates what ideas actually are, or to put it differently, how they relate to the rest of the world.¹⁴

By forestalling idealist interpretations of *E* I and II and subsequently by highlighting the 'structure' of Spinoza's rationalism—which in Gueroult's

¹⁴ Gueroult, *Spinoza II*, Chapters 4 and 5; Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Chapter 1.

analysis is essentially the outcome of Spinoza's denial of the Cartesian doctrine of God's *will* having decreed the 'eternal truths' of mathematics and physics¹⁵—Gueroult paved the way for a gradual acceptance of Matheron's understanding of the politics implied by *E III, IV and V*. The latter's *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* appeared in 1969, after having been put forward as *grande thèse* at the Sorbonne the previous year. In Matheron's analysis, which is now shared by most French and even by many English and American specialists, Spinoza's 'horizontal', that is anti-hierarchical, ontology fits hand in glove with the essentially democratic orientation of his political philosophy, according to which single modes act on the basis of their individual *conatus*, itself the outcome of the infinitely complex causally determined relationship of individual beings with their surroundings. What is more, both Gueroult's and Matheron's conclusions have inspired a large generation of Continental and several Anglo-phone philosophers who turned towards Spinoza as an ally of what for the lack of a better word has come to be known as 'post-modernism'. In the long run, a *third* French book on Spinoza, dating from 1968, may well turn out to have been decisive in this respect. For of all the major French post-modernists, Gilles Deleuze was the only one to write an in-depth commentary on Spinoza, and his *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* appeared almost simultaneously with Gueroult's and Matheron's analyses.¹⁶

To the extent that French philosophers during the 1960s grew particularly disaffected with the canon of 'modern' philosophy that took its cue from the Cartesian *Cogito*, and which reached the twentieth century through mediation of Kant's 'transcendental' philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology, it would seem that especially Spinoza's refusal to take his point of departure from an examination of the *subject* will remain one of the principal sources for any future attempt to re-define modernity as such. The closest Spinoza comes to identifying the *Cogito* is his proposition that 'man thinks' (*E, II, 9*). But this, he adds, should in no way be perceived as implying that man is a substance. Individual minds being modes

¹⁵ The importance of this doctrine for Descartes' metaphysics has been established relatively recently. See Alquié (with whom Gueroult clashed repeatedly): *La Découverte métaphysique de l'homme chez Descartes*.

¹⁶ Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, followed by the brief but brilliant *Spinoza. Philosophie pratique*. Although Deleuze's interpretation, in particular of *E I*, differs significantly from Gueroult's, he wrote a glowing review, claiming that now, at last, a *scientific* interpretation of Spinozism was available: 'Spinoza et la méthode générale de M. Gueroult'.

of Thought, and individual bodies being modes of the attribute Extension, man is the natural product of his surroundings. It is indeed from the interaction between 'my' body and the bodies that affect it that ideas concerning the world and myself originate. Deleuze's anti-humanism, his materialism, his insistence on 'affects' as 'productive forces' generating rationality rather than opposing it, and his quest for a philosophical 'ethology' all appear to be critically informed by his study of the *E*. By the same token, it would be naïve to expect of this appropriating analysis even the pretence of textual fidelity.¹⁷ Deleuze and his admirers are trying not so much to approach, or to put it more fashionably, to 'colonise' Spinoza as an object of historical and analytical scrutiny, as to stay loyal to Spinozism as a creative 'force' itself. To them, to be a 'Spinozist' does not require adherence to a definite set of propositions concerning the world, man and his salvation, but the recognition that this particular philosophy offers first and foremost a way of looking at the world, man, etc., and is itself a creative force, characterised by its ability to duplicate itself continuously, as Macherey once put it.¹⁸

2. *The Man*

In view of the drastic changes Spinoza's reputation as a philosopher has undergone over the last three centuries, the image of the man himself appears to have been fairly stable. Two elements have always dominated the appreciation of Spinoza's life. On the one hand there is the sobering recognition that much in his biography is unclear to say the least, while on the other even many of his harshest critics agreed that Spinoza's walk of life left little to be desired. Most famously, Pierre Bayle, in the article he devoted to the philosopher in his *Dictionnaire* (1697), arrived at the

¹⁷ See Macherey, *Avec Spinoza*, 237–244 and 'The Encounter with Spinoza'; Howie, *Deleuze and Spinoza*.

¹⁸ Macherey, *Avec Spinoza*, 31: 'qu'est-ce qu'être "spinoziste"? Ce n'est certainement pas proclamer, et prétendre justifier, l'adhésion à un ensemble d'idées dont la figure serait parfaitement délimitées et close. Mais c'est plutôt se laisser prendre, et comme aspirer, par l'ouverture d'une rationalité, d'une puissance intellectuelle, perpétuellement ouverte, qui trouve son adéquation en s'identifiant au mouvement de la réalité, et non simplement en effectuant un double conforme.' Similar sentiments were expressed more than a century ago by Sir Frederick Pollock: 'Spinozism, as a living and constructive force, is not a system, but a habit of mind', quoted in Boucher (ed.), *Spinoza*, vol. 1, vi. This idea was also the point of departure of the essays collected in Vinciguerra (ed.), *Quel avenir pour Spinoza?*. Many of the authors involved have found a common platform on <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/>.

conclusion that Spinoza's life confirmed the possibility of virtuous atheism.¹⁹ Of course, the occasional opposing voice could be heard. Some of Spinoza's earliest critics felt his separation of philosophy and theology and the way in which he read the Old Testament revealed bad faith since his metaphysics clearly excluded the possibility of any meaningful theology.²⁰ Others, most notably Schopenhauer, made much of what Colerus' biography (1705) had to say on Spinoza's habit 'to divert himself': 'he look'd for some Spiders, and made'em fight together, or he threw some Flies into the Cobweb, and was so well pleased with that Battel, that he wou'd sometimes break into laughter'.²¹ But for the occasional exception, a deep-felt respect for Spinoza's *personality* appears to have pervaded. Even Bertrand Russell, who felt Spinozism was deeply flawed, started his chapter on Spinoza in his *History of Philosophy* with the affirmation that in his view Spinoza was 'the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers': 'ethically he is supreme'.²²

What fellow philosophers seem to have found most appealing in Spinoza's biography, in addition to the obvious *sincerity* it reveals, is the total dedication it revealed to his *work*. Especially the letters, first published by his friends in the *OP*, provide a near-perfect illustration of a life completely devoted to the production of Philosophy. It would seem, however, that the correspondence now available—little has been added since the seventeenth century—was the outcome of careful censorship on the part of Spinoza's friends. It was edited by friends and, quite apart from the obvious fact that they must have ignored essential letters still available in 1677, the almost complete lack of personal references suggests that they were at pains not only to protect friends and acquaintances, but also to construct a *vita* that would not in any way inculpate Spinoza's *Opera*.²³ They were fully aware of the notoriety surrounding Spinoza's views for some time already. Indeed, they themselves had prevented Spinoza from publishing the *E* in 1675, two years before he passed away.²⁴ Any comparison with the correspondence of philosophers like Descartes and Locke, let alone

¹⁹ See in particular Wootton, 'Pierre Bayle Libertine?'; Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, Chapters 4 and 5; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Chapter 18.

²⁰ Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, Chapter 4.

²¹ Quoted from the 1706 translation: Boucher (ed.), *Spinoza I*, 73. See, by the way, Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 21, note 9.

²² Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, Chapter 10.

²³ Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica*, Chapter 1. It is, for instance, hard to believe that Spinoza never exchanged letters with Franciscus van den Enden and Adriaan Koerbagh.

²⁴ Spinoza, *Letters*, 321–322 (Letter 68).

Bayle and Leibniz, each of whom left behind at least many hundreds if not several thousands of letters, turns the collection of eighty odd letters to and from Spinoza into a very meagre collection. What is more, there are at least two crucial episodes in Spinoza's life about which we know next to nothing. Both the events leading up to the ban from the Portuguese synagogue of Amsterdam in 1656 and the pivotal years immediately following his break-up with the Jewish community are still shrouded in mystery.²⁵

As a result, to this day we must satisfy ourselves with data concerning Spinoza's personal life that hardly allow for the composition of a biography revealing anything like a psychological portrait. In a sense, the impersonal biography we are left with reflects Spinoza's refusal to formulate, as Matheron once put it, a proper philosophical anthropology.²⁶ Recently, two biographers have tried to meet this challenge, and they did so in very different ways.²⁷ Margaret Gullan-Whur has attempted to reconstruct Spinoza's personality on the basis of the moral psychology delivered in the *E*. Assuming that Spinoza's analysis of man's emotional constitution was rooted in personal experience, she arrived at highly speculative conclusions. In particular her assessment of what she considers to have been Spinoza's misogynous tendencies, supposedly deriving from the unfortunate relationship with his step-mother, and the homosexual overtones she feels able to detect in Spinoza's relationship to Simon Joosten de Vries, have made her biography something of a *succès de scandale*. Steven Nadler, on the other hand, was far more circumspect in his assessment of the sources now available. As a consequence, his biography does not present us with a psychological portrait of any depth. Instead, Nadler chose to situate Spinoza in a *context* from which the latter's philosophy can be seen to have emerged. As far as I am concerned, the heavy emphasis Nadler lays on Spinoza's Jewish background fails to convince, since so far no relevant connection has been established between the history of the Portuguese Jews living in seventeenth-century Amsterdam and the mature philosophy of Spinoza.²⁸

The fact is, however, that Spinoza's Jewish origins have always been an integral part of his reputation, and recently several attempts have been launched again to turn him into an *essentially* Jewish thinker. At this point

²⁵ Still fundamental: Mignini, 'Données et problèmes de la chronologie spinozienne'.

²⁶ Matheron, *Anthropologie et politique au XVII^e siècle*, Chapter 2.

²⁷ Gullan-Whur, *Within Reason*; Nadler, *Spinoza. A Life*.

²⁸ Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy*; Van Bunge, 'Spinoza's Jewish Identity'. See, however, also Chapter 1 of this book.

it is important to be precise. From the late seventeenth century onward many books have been written in order to show that Spinoza's philosophy was crucially dependent on Jewish sources, including the Kabbalah, Maimonides, Gersonides, Crescas, and many others.²⁹ It is evident that especially Spinoza's early writings testify to his acquaintance with a variety of Jewish authors like Leon Ebreo and Abraham Cohen Herrera. In addition the *TTP* deals at some length with Maimonides, whose views on scriptural interpretation Spinoza rejected emphatically, and it goes without saying that his analysis of the Old Testament is deeply indebted to his Jewish upbringing. But as Ze'ev Levy put it, it seems equally clear that 'the Jewish thinkers exerted little influence on the shaping of Spinoza's general philosophical system'.³⁰ As far as his metaphysics, his theory of knowledge, his moral psychology, and his political philosophy are concerned, Descartes and Hobbes were far more important to Spinoza than any Jewish author. And it just so happened that both Descartes and Hobbes were widely read in the Dutch Republic at the time when Spinoza came into his own as a philosopher.³¹

Nevertheless, the tradition to present Spinoza as a Jewish thinker has undoubtedly had a great impact on his reputation, and will probably continue to do so. However one may feel about, for instance, the Marrano-hypothesis made famous by Yirmiyahu Yovel, his *Spinoza and Other Heretics* was a success, drawing some rave reviews, and over the last few years many, mostly Jewish, scholars have joined the effort to demonstrate that despite the fact that Spinoza was cast out from the synagogue, he remained at heart a Jewish thinker, heir to an Ibero-Jewish tradition of concealment and subterfuge.³² In connection with Spinoza's reputation, however, another line of inquiry should be taken notice of as well, namely the debate on what Spinoza's philosophy might mean for Jews today. Could Spinoza perhaps serve as a common point of reference for all those modern Jews who have abandoned their religious tradition, but who are looking for ways of thinking that in their view Jews *should* cultivate? Not, of course, to the exclusion of non-Jews, but with a view to being both

²⁹ A small selection of relevant titles besides Wolfson, *Spinoza*; Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthum*; Joël, *Zur Genesis der Lehre Spinozas*; Révah, *Des Marranes à Spinoza*; Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols.; Ravven and Goodman (eds.), *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy*.

³⁰ Levy, *Baruch or Benedict*, 20.

³¹ See Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, Parts 1 and 2; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*; Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, Chapter 14.

³² See, however, Chapter 1.

secular and modern, and yet remaining attached *in some way* to the intellectual and moral example set by a distant cousin.³³

3. *Spinoza Today*

Shortly after the Second World War, a young American scholar sent in a paper on Spinoza to an Anglo-American journal, only to be told by the editors ‘We are not now and never will be interested in Spinoza’.³⁴ Despite the efforts of such formidable historians and philosophers as Richard Popkin, Jonathan Bennett, Edwin Curley, and Michael Della Rocca, there is as yet little to suggest that philosophers working in the analytical tradition are prepared to include Spinoza into the canon of their Great Thinkers, and especially the Deleuzian twist of much recent French scholarship may well prove to be an obstacle to a further proliferation of interest in the English-speaking world.³⁵ The few inroads French Spinozism has made into the Anglo-Saxon world involve Literary Criticism and Feminism, domains that hardly belong to the core curriculum of the average Anglo-American Philosophy Department.³⁶ The same holds, I presume, for Antonio Negri’s and Michael Hardt’s *Empire* (2000)—a massive, playful ‘post-Marxist’ analysis of ‘the new political order’ produced by globalisation, packed with references to Spinoza. Interestingly, the otherwise favourable review published by the *London Review of Books* cast doubt especially on Negri’s interpretation of Spinoza as well as on the revolutionary implications of Spinoza’s political philosophy.³⁷ Perhaps *Radical Enlightenment*, together with Antonio Damasio’s *Looking for Spinoza* (2003), will be able to accomplish a resurgence of interest, but over the last few years Donald Davidson’s essay on *E III* has remained an exception

³³ See, for instance Silverman, *Baruch Spinoza*; Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*.

³⁴ Smith, *Spinoza’s Book of Life*, ix, referring to a story told by Richard H. Popkin.

³⁵ Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*; Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*; Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem*. For a recent synthesis of Popkin’s efforts over the last few decades, see his *Spinoza*. I wrote these lines several years ago, and I am happy to admit that I was mistaken: in the English speaking world a very active and extremely promising generation of Spinoza scholars has now emerged, including Carlos Fraenkel, Katharina Hübner, Michael LeBuffe, Beth Lord, Yitzhak Melamed, and Michael Rosenthal.

³⁶ Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*; Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*.

³⁷ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*. Michael Bull’s review appeared in vol. 23, no. 19, on 4 October 2001.

to the rule that major Anglo-Saxon philosophers tend to regard Spinoza as a probably deep but basically obscure philosopher, whose outdated terminology prevents his work from being taken into account in current debates about *God, Man and his Well-Being*.³⁸ What is more, the left-wing appropriation of Spinoza's works has recently been challenged both from a conservative perspective and by the Slovenian 'ultra-Deleuzian' Slavoj Žižek.³⁹

And then, there is yet another, *internal* tendency at work in French Spinozism, affecting the representation of Spinoza as a philosopher, that may well complicate the future development of Spinoza scholarship as such. While attempts to include Spinoza into the canon of Judaism suffer from the inability to connect the first part of his life as a Jew to the philosophy he developed during the latter half, the Deleuzian disregard for the fact that this philosophy was formulated by a historical *person* by the name of Spinoza runs the risk of undermining the very basis on which the pre-eminence of French Spinoza scholarship was built. Above all, Gueroult and Matheron shared the conviction that interpreting philosophical texts demands absolute fidelity to the letter of the texts involved. Yet Deleuze's as well as Macherey's analyses reveal a definite ambiguity once it comes to situating the *author* of Spinozism in his seventeenth-century context. For all their efforts to present Spinozism as an anonymous force itself, they find it difficult to resist the temptation to explain how it could come to pass that this particular force first took shape in the writings of this particular man.⁴⁰

Philosophical flamboyance and textual accuracy do not necessarily exclude each other, but both Deleuze's insistence that in a sense Spinoza cannot be considered part of the history of philosophy since his work subverts the very principles of this history, and his conviction that truly comprehending Spinozism involves somehow becoming a Spinozist oneself, simply undermine any serious attempt at situating and understanding the

³⁸ Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*; Davidson, 'Spinoza's Causal Theory of the Affects'. In September 1986 American and Continental scholars met in Chicago, and a constructive dialogue appears to have taken place: Curley and Moreau (eds.), *Spinoza*. See also *The God of Spinoza* by Richard Mason, a Cambridge philosopher and logician who has the audacity not only to refer to Deleuze, but even to quote Derrida. In the latest major collection of essays on Spinoza to appear in English, however, a new generation of Anglophone experts shows hardly any interest in the results of Continental scholarship: Koistinen and Biro (eds.), *Spinoza*.

³⁹ Verbeek, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*; Žižek, 'Is It Possible Not to Love Spinoza?'

⁴⁰ See for instance Macherey, *Avec Spinoza*, 25 ff.

philosophy of Spinoza.⁴¹ Fuelled by the widespread dissatisfaction with the Kantian historiography of early modern philosophy and inspired by the unfortunate lack of documentary evidence concerning Spinoza's life, this ambivalent attitude towards the past and our (in)ability to come to terms with it, together with this radical interpretation of what it might mean to stay loyal to a text, has, again, inspired some scholars to identify Spinoza's 'otherness' or the 'anomaly' his thought represents with 'the Scandal of his Jewishness'.⁴² Thus, the lacunae in our historical understanding of Spinoza, which at first made it possible to think of Spinozism as some kind of anonymous 'force', have subsequently been used to construct an essentially Jewish otherness, which, however, is no longer supported by any firm, *textual* basis.

Finally, any consideration of the reputation of early modern philosophers should take heed of the remarkable degree of professionalisation historical scholarship has enjoyed over the last few decades. The fact that today Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, and Spinoza each bring together dozens if not hundreds of academic 'specialists' annually producing a staggering amount of professional literature on their chosen field of expertise, forces us to address the question *whose* perception of, for example, Spinoza results in a genuine *reputation*. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Spinoza was never the exclusive property of professional historians of philosophy. The first major British expert, Sir Frederick Pollock (1845–1937), was an Oxford professor of jurisprudence, and in particular during the second half of the nineteenth century theologians, free-thinkers and rabbis all construed their own Spinozas, sometimes with remarkable results. In 1864, E.A. Hitchcock, a West Point graduate and major-general during the American Civil War, but also the author of several studies on the history of Hermeticism, took it upon himself to demonstrate the kinship of Spinozism with the ravings of Swedenborg.⁴³ A few years later J.R. Leifchild, British commissioner of coal fields and expert on life insurances, fisheries, and weather forecasting, set out to prove the resemblance between Spinoza's thought and Buddhism.⁴⁴ Novelists from Berthold Auerbach and I.B. Singer to Bernard Malamud and even P.G. Wodehouse have also in one way or another contributed

⁴¹ See Macherey, 'The Encounter with Spinoza'.

⁴² Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*. See also Brykman, *La Judéité de Spinoza*; Albiac, *La Synagogue vide*.

⁴³ Boucher (ed.), *Spinoza III*, 179–198.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 46–54.

to the reputation of the philosopher beyond the confines of the modern Department of Philosophy.⁴⁵ The Dutch author Leon de Winter wrote a novel and a screenplay in which Spinoza plays a prominent part, entitled *Hoffman's Honger*. The Hollywood actors Elliott Gould and Jacqueline Bisset starred in the movie (1993), in which Spinoza was portrayed (quite convincingly) as a cynical sage by Huub Stapel.

More recently, in the wake of the attack on the Twin Towers and the assassinations of the right-wing politician (and overtly gay dandy) Pim Fortuyn and the film director and columnist (and great-grandson to Vincent's brother) Theo van Gogh, both Dutch newspaper columnists and politicians have started to refer to Spinoza as the first truly modern thinker and the first Dutchman to herald the Enlightenment. Apparently, Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* has found its way to Dutch opinion leaders, who from the early 2000s onward have been feverishly trying to re-define the concepts of tolerance and citizenship. By doing so, they are actually re-assessing what it might mean to be Dutch. In the Fall of 2004, Israel, together with the Louvain philosopher and long-time president of the *Spinozahuis* society Herman de Dijn, gave a lecture on Spinoza, Toleration, and the Enlightenment at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam, in the presence of Queen Beatrix, accompanied by the Princess of Orange and over a hundred academics, politicians, and journalists. This event took place only four days after the assassination of Theo van Gogh, the memory of which hang as a dark cloud over the proceedings. Clearly, Spinoza's philosophy is just as urgent in the Dutch as in the French context, although the reasons of Dutch intellectuals to return to Spinoza are very different from those of the French. What is more, professional philosophers in the Netherlands are quickly turning into Anglophone academics, and in view of the predominant philosophical tradition in the Anglo-American world and its global impact it very much remains to be seen to what extent Spinoza's reputation will remain as powerful elsewhere in Europe as it is in France and the Netherlands today.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See *Studia Spinozana* 5 (1989), theme issue *Spinoza and Literature*.

⁴⁶ In 2003, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW) issued a report on the state of affairs in Dutch academic philosophy, entitled *Wegen in de wijsbegeerte*, which on the one hand established both the inevitability and the desirability of this increasingly Anglophone profile, while on the other warning against some of its possible consequences. For the wider context, see Rupp, *Van oude en nieuwe universiteiten*.

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